SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

O. 419. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 9TH, 1897. [ONE PENNY.

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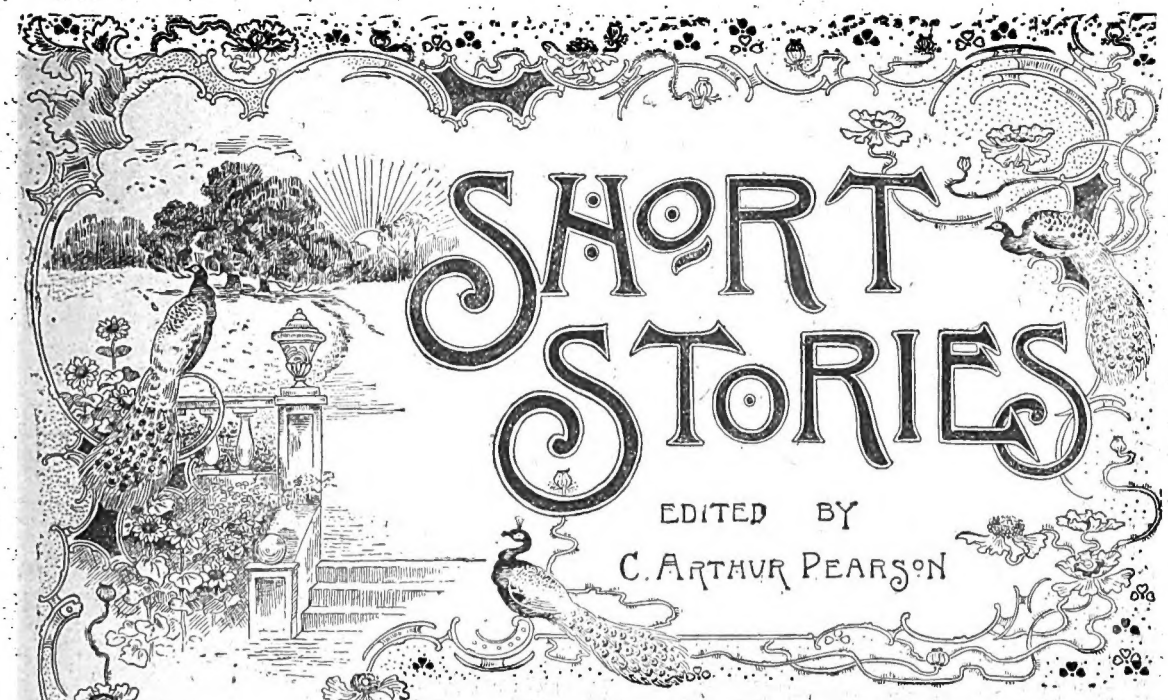

No. 419.] For the Week ending January 9th, 1897. [1D.

A FEAST OF FICTION

A COPPER COIN.

FOUR nights in succession I saw the same scene depicted in a dream, and to a man who very seldom indulges in such luxuries, I may as well admit it upset me more than I relished. In the oft-repeated dream I saw a woman lying in bed, her arms stretched full out at right angles to the body. She was asleep. I could just distinguish that she was young and of surpassing beauty, when a dark visaged individual with a Vandyke beard would come on the scene in that mysterious manner characters have in dreams, and deliberately stab the woman. So realistic was the whole scene that I could not only see the blood spurt, but actually feel drops splash against my face.

At the time I write about I was just beginning to make a name for myself as a criminal lawyer, and was busy working up a rather intricate case. I naturally tried to dispel all thoughts of the ugly dream, and attempted to cheat myself into the belief that it was overwork and a disordered liver; but, try as I would, I could not make headway with my work, and on the fifth day was plodding away at business that ought to have been done, but had got delayed owing to my inability to grasp the pros and cons. Determined to conquer the morbid sensation, and work off arrears, I stayed at the office somewhat later than usual. I dismissed my two clerks and gave instructions to the commissionaire who came on duty at six o'clock, that I was not in to anyone.

Between half-past six and seven this man tapped quietly at the outer office door. I went to see who was there, rather ruffled in temper, too.

"There's a young lady downstairs, sir, says she saw you were in your office, and would like to see you on most urgent business. She says she's called several times to-day, but your clerk always said you were out."

I remembered that Joynson had told me about some lady having called, and not being in a position to turn up my nose at clients, I told the commissionaire to show her up.

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Although I have gained a good position, I always have said that my physical powers were predominant, but I was more than thankful that I happened to be seated as my client was shown in, else I'm certain I would have collapsed, for she was no other than the victim of my dream.

Mechanically I pointed to a chair, and then leaned over the papers strewed on my desk, to gain a minute's respite to pull myself together.

"You wished to consult me about some urgent matter, I think," I eventually managed to remark.

"Yes, I must apologise for coming so late, but I called twice before, and my case is urgent."

"Don't mention it, I regret being out and giving you so much trouble. Will you explain your case, and no doubt I can help you."

"I am an artist's model—not through choice, but for bread-and-butter. About three weeks ago I answered an advertisement that said a sculptor required a model. After two interviews, terms were arranged, and an agreement drawn up. I have posed eight times altogether, the last time was a fortnight ago yesterday. I have declined to go to his studio again because of his behaviour, and he now threatens me."

"What is the sculptor's name and address?"

"Anton Barittz—his place is 18, Vandor Street. He has the whole house from the first floor up. His studio is on the top flight."

"Quite so. Now, what was the nature of the agreement? Did you get a copy of it?"

"No, but it was to the effect that I was to pose so many times, partly draped, for a sovereign each, and twelve times without the drapery for two pounds each. I have posed six times draped and twice without, but absolutely decline to go there again."

"Has he paid you each time, or does he owe you anything?"

"He always paid me as I was leaving."

"And now, tell me, what is the nature of the threat he holds over you?"

"He says that if I don't fulfil my contract his work will be spoilt, and he will kill me; and a foreign-looking man follows me about wherever I go, and I am frightened."

"Ah! Well, if you will leave me your card, I will communicate with you. I don't think he will molest you after receiving the letter I shall send him to-night."

I was so relieved at her going that I didn't even look for her name on the card for some time, but when I did, saw printed thereon:

"Anton Barittz, 18, Vandor Street."

I wrote to the gentleman, stirring him up, but had to do so carefully, not having the lady's name. I got no reply, nor did I receive any communication from the artist's model, and as the days went by, and the dreams no longer disturbed me, the whole matter gradually faded from my recollection. It was only a temporary forgetfulness, for a couple of weeks later I heard the newsboys calling out:

"Horrible murder of an artist in Vandor Street."

I invested in one of the halfpenny evening papers that gloat over the morbid details of a murder, and read that Barittz had been murdered while lying in bed—stabbed through the heart.

Everybody knows that dreams are supposed to work out exactly contrary; it was only natural, therefore, I should at once conclude that the mild, persecuted model had committed the crime. It was no business of mine, however, and I kept my own counsel, but never remember taking such an interest in a murder as I did in this one. The police, despite all their efforts, were completely at sea. Nothing like the vestige of a clue could they get. Even the knife or dagger with which the crime was perpetrated had been removed. The servants were all out at the time, and the whole affair was shrouded in mystery.

Occasionally I thought of telling the police about the visit of the model, but on second thoughts I decided not to, as if anyone were arrested and charged with the crime I would in all probability have either to defend or prosecute. One thing, however, a mere curiosity perhaps, but I could not resist going to see the murdered man. I felt convinced in my mind that I would find in him the dark-visaged, Vandyke-bearded man of my dreams. I had no difficulty in getting access to the chamber of death, but to my astonishment, almost dismay, the dead man's features bore no resemblance to the man of my dreams. He was fair, at least for a foreigner, and wore a long, silky, brown beard, as unlike my imaginative creation as could be.

On my return to the office, my clerk informed me that a gentleman was waiting to see me—his name was Franco Barittz, brother of the murdered man I had just seen.

I cannot say that I was much surprised to find my visitor the real murderer of my dream, and every nerve of my body quivered with excitement as I acknowledged his bow.

"I am, as no doubt your clerk has told you, brother to the M. Barittz who was murdered the day before yesterday—and I have called upon you to ask your aid."

He spoke perfect English, and if my life had depended on my correct answer, I couldn't have told to what nationality he belonged.

"I'm afraid the police can give you more assistance, monsieur, than I possibly can—at present at any rate," I cautiously replied.

"Ah, but the police are such dolts—and I hear that Mr. Lawrence is spoken of as a remarkably shrewd man in criminal matters."

I smiled at the forced compliment, wondering when the real object of the visit would be made known, and what nature it might take.

"I have already made many discoveries," M. Barittz continued. "First of all, I learnt that some lady, an artist's model, had visited you here late in the evening. That she had complained of receiving insults from my brother, and of being threatened and followed, or in some way molested. Now, Mr. Lawrence, the whole of that is false. This Miss Rose Mayton never entered my brother's house, nor did she receive any communication from him. As a matter of fact, family matters have occupied his time so much lately that he has practically neglected his art altogether."

"Then why should the lady come to me with that story—what benefit could she derive from making such a statement?"

"We will find that out in time. In the meanwhile, I have two very sharp detectives of my own working on the case, and I hourly expect to hear that they have traced this model, and that brings me to the object of my visit. Will you tell me the address the lady gave you?"

"That is more than I can, no matter how anxious I might be to tell you, because instead of leaving a card of her own, she left me one of your brother's."

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I noticed just the least twinge of the muscles of his mouth as I gave him the last bit of information, but took care not to let him have any suspicion that I had noticed it; but from his reserved manner afterwards, and his persistent twisting of the conversation to commonplaces, I gathered that he doubted me. Promising to call next day he left me, after offering both a fee and profuse thanks and apologies.

My own work was fated to interruptions that day, for I had no sooner got comfortably settled than another visitor was announced.

"Who is it this time?" I asked rather petulantly.

"Ex-sergeant Banner, sir; says it is most important."

"Well, Banner, have you taken to work again?"

"Yes, sir, and the rummest job I was ever on."

"Ah?"

"Yes, sir, it's this artist murder in Vandor Street. A tall, dark chap, with a pointed beard, comes to me the other night an' says: 'I'm the brother of that murdered chap in Vandor Street; I believe he was killed by a woman who is an artist's model.' He gave me the particulars and finished up by saying: 'Find that woman for me and I'll give you a hundred pounds.'"

"A good offer, Banner."

"You bet I was on it at once, sir, but now if you please, I'm being shadowed myself; and an hour ago a chap puts this note into my hands."

He gave me a scrap of paper upon which was written:

"Content yourself with doing the work you will be paid for."

"What have you been doing, Banner?"

"Well, sir, you know that when you're on a case you must look into everything, and leave nothing to chance. Now I don't like the face of that man Barittz, and seeing him last night talking in Oxford Circus with a tall woman in a dark veil, I got suspicious, and shadowed him, and overheard a little of their conversation. I heard him tell the woman that he would do for that girl as soon as he found her, and she replied about getting something first. I didn't hear any more because some fellow came and jostled up against me—I suppose he was a spy in Barittz's employ."

"Pity you didn't shadow the woman."

"I did, Mr. Lawrence, and she went into the house in Vandor Street."

"It's developing into quite a mysterious case, Banner, and I think it might almost pay you better to watch the principal movers in this little drama, than keep at a search I'm afraid will, or might, be futile."

"Don't you think that woman exists, sir?"

"Oh, yes, but I think they have a reason for sending you on a wild-goose chase. Leave the finding of this model to me, you keep an eye on Barittz, I'll supply the necessary funds. You might also find out what you can about the occupants of 18, Vandor Street."

I gave Banner a blank cheque, in case of emergencies, and he departed, no doubt determined to do or die, but I verily believe when he left me he hadn't an idea which way to turn. I felt convinced, however, that whatever was to be found out, Banner was the man to succeed. He had been one of the smartest men in the Criminal Investigation Department, and only but for his health breaking down, which necessitated his retiring, would have risen high in the force. For one thing, he looked a born fool, and as innocent as any country yokel, and he was a splendid linguist.

Three weeks went by and I neither saw nor heard anything of Banner—indeed the whole case seemed to have died, the evening papers couldn't get enough to make a paragraph of, and I dare say those who did think of the case at all, shrugged their shoulders and sagely remarked that it was only another instance where the police were beaten.

The first intimation I received informing me that the case was still somebody's business was a peculiarly worded telegram, from Charing Cross office.

"British ensign will be hoisted at three o'clock promptly."

I knew it was from Banner, and surely enough at three o'clock he was duly announced.

"Well!" I exclaimed as that worthy entered my room, "you have been wandering all over the globe, I should think."

"I've been to Paris, Hamburg, Moscow and Petersburg, sir, thanks to your foresight in giving me that cheque."

"Do you know, Banner, it never occurred to me to find out whether you had used it or not, but I have been very busy." Which was quite true.

"The night after I left you, Mr Lawrence, I was giving some instructions to my pal when out comes Barittz with a bag and rug, jumps into a hansom and drives off. There wasn't another cab about, and I felt real wild. I ran into Cromwell Road, hailed a cab from the stand and told him to just let her hum to Victoria."

"Why Victoria; did you hear the destination?"

"No, sir, but it was nearly half-past seven, and I knew the continental train left Victoria at 8.50. Sure enough his nibs was there. The next question was money—then disguise. I had about six shillings in my pocket and it was then a few minutes past eight."

"Rather awkward, Banner! What did you do?"

"Well, sir, I'll admit I felt somewhat in a hole, but I meant going by the train, money or no money. I knew the fare to Paris was 18s. 7d. I then remembered that I knew a man who kept a small inn at Newhaven. I ran to the booking office, found the fare was 4s. 8½d., and of course the rest was simple. I got my pal to rig me out both with toggery and funds. I kept a watchful eye on Barittz in Paris, but it was in Hamburg where I learned all about him. Of course, I don't know for certain, but I'm almost sure that he is an emissary of some Nihilist or Socialistic society, carrying gems of information about, principally through the medium of pieces of sculpture. One item of importance I did find out, and that was that Barittz never had a brother."

"Then I wonder who the murdered man was and why he was killed?"

"My idea is, sir, that he found out something about Barittz, and he, on the principle that 'dead men tell no tales,' put an end to him."

"As likely as not."

"Well, sir, I'm off to see what's been going on while I've been away. I'll come back and report."

About an hour afterwards he returned.

"We've found the artist's model, sir, and so has Barittz; at least my man says he saw one of his spies hurrying off towards Vandor Street as soon as he was certain of the girl."

"And what do you propose, Banner?"

"If we're sharp, sir, we might get there first and hide in the room and hear all that passes between 'em. The lady is willing, sir, so long as we promise that no harm shall come to her."

Banner and I immediately left for the house of Miss Mayton, and were lucky enough to arrive first. We had hardly spoken ten words, however, before a sharp knocking at the door announced the arrival of Barittz.

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Banner hid behind a screen, and I got myself concealed beneath the heavy folds of some curtains, close to the sofa, upon which Miss Mayton was reclining.

"Ha, ha! my fair traitress, I've found you at last, have I?" savagely remarked Barittz as he bounced into the room.

"I am certainly here, and have been for some weeks. What is it you want this time?"

"You know what it is I want, you she-devil, and I mean to have it or kill you here as you lie."

"That wouldn't save your life, M. Barittz."

"No, but I could die calmer and more contented if I killed you first."

"Supposing I told you that I hadn't got this little bauble you make such a fuss over, what then?"

"I should say mademoiselle lied. Listen, you took that little copper coin—the insignia of my position—not knowing its value; already one man has been executed by the League for not having it, and unless I produce it to-morrow night in Hamburg, I shall be assassinated, too. Now, what did I do to you? Merely tried to kiss you. Many a woman in your humble position would have felt honoured by such an attention from an artist like me. You, however, in your stupidity, struggled and fought, and while doing so detached a trinket from my watch-guard. I didn't miss it at first, but when I did I appealed to you, feeling sure that you had it; I say I appealed to you to give it to me. I even offered you a large sum of money for it. You pretended you had not got it. Then you ran away and hid, and despite the efforts of the spies I put on to trace you, I failed to hear of your whereabouts until now. I ought to have given M. Carnac the symbol of office the day before the murder, but as I had not got it. I couldn't. He was executed in my house by order of the Nihilist committee for disobeying orders. That is one murder on your soul. Do you want to have another?"

The woman sat upon the sofa, and as she spoke looked radiantly beautiful.

"You lie, M. Barittz. I saw you stab that man while he was asleep."

"*Sacré!* Then you were in my house were you, you *canaille* of an English spy. You shall never spy on me again—die like a dog!"

From where I peeped behind the curtains, I could just see the bright gleam of some steel instrument poised ere descending on the helpless woman, when I heard a sharp ping—and the next second felt something wet splash against my face. Banner had shot the man dead.

The Russian police, when acquainted with the facts, informed me that Carnac was a spy in their employ, and that they had made every arrangement for capturing Barittz on his next visit to the Continent.

My dream was realised after all, but I never anticipated that those four nightmares would be the means of my finding the loveliest and dearest woman on earth for a wife.

C. ENGLAND COWAN.

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Which is the Cleverest County? J. HOLT SCHOOLING.
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How the Proceedings of Parliament are Recorded. A. A. TAYLOR.
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Illustrated by C. CLARK.

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THE room was a large and magnificently appointed one in the palace of Gatsclinia. An immense fire burned in the elegant porcelain stove—it was almost red hot—a table littered with pamphlets and papers, also a couple of arm-chairs were drawn up before it; two men stood there, one old, but alert, stern, uncompromising, General Sergius Kalitzin, chief of the Imperial Military Police of Russia. The other, young, handsome, bearded, resolute, Alexander, the Tsar.

The Ruler held in his hand a pen, and presently he sat down and dipped it in the ink. He wrote rapidly some twenty lines and handed them to the General—this is an Imperial method not uncommon of replying to communications of a certain nature.

Kalitzin took it and read, his face darkening with excited blood as he did so, his brows contracting, his lips quivering, his powerful hand shaking.

"Your Majesty!" cried he under his breath, "I implore of you, for the sake of the Empire, your father's sacred memory, your oath, your religion, do not venture on such enterprises!"

Alexander remained silent, merely shaking his head with a smile and pointing to the slip of paper containing his autocratic instructions.

"But, sire, I implore pardon!" The old man bent his knee to the young one. "If you persist in these investigations yourself, death, death is positive. I tell you, as I have just rehearsed to you, the Nihilists are a power we must dread; we must crush, stamp out, burn, torture, strangle, for it is strong, and these of whom I have told you are keen as daggers. They have sworn; they are sharp; they have taken the oath, and if your Majesty persists in the course here outlined, I, the chief of the Military Police of the Empire, confess to you that I may prove of no avail."

The Tsar again smiled as he extended his hand to raise the General, at the same moment taking from him the slip of paper, lighting it at the fire, and holding it until it crumbled into a feathery nothing.

Kalitzin rose and bowed; he knew that the secret orders—so secret as not even to be spoken lest the very walls should possess ears, and always burned lest trace of them might fall into treacherous fingers—must be obeyed, yet there was trouble, and even sorrow in his countenance as he quitted the presence of his Imperial master, and hastened to give directions in connection with the Sovereign's proposed visit to Paris, for which place he set out on the following morning. Kalitzin went also; in these days he was never more than three feet distant from the Tsar, with eyes watchful as the hungry tiger's, and a scent for danger as acute.

Once arrived in the French capital, it would seem that the precautions for the Russian safety were redoubled, and amid all that hubbub of fêtes, shows, pageants, balls, exhibitions and reviews, there stalked grimly the living, breathing, palpitating purpose of the followers of Prince Krapotkine, the determination to kill the Tsar.

Who was to do it?

General Kalitzin knew, he and three others; one, the person who was to do it; another, the accomplice; the third, the victim himself; these were all, and yet Alexander smiled on and went about apparently in unconcern.

When a man is guarded as he was, it is not hard to smile with unconcern.

To-night he sat in the superbly decorated box prepared for him at the Opera. Calvé was singing *Carmen*, but with a motion of weariness he leaned back, and concealing a yawn, withdrew behind the shadow of the silken curtain.

With a languid hand he picked up his *lorgnette* and surveyed the house. Glancing to the right, round the circle of boxes, his gaze was suddenly arrested as the gaze of a man is arrested but once in the course of his life.

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By the sight of a woman's face.

This woman was dressed like a Spanish woman in a Velasquez portrait, in clinging robes of dull browns and fawns, a little cap of the same hues sat on top of her head; her hair was dull yellow, and it was worn in a curious tangled mass with wing-like loops over her ears; her arms, in their tightly-puffed sleeves, were very long and slender, and she held them crossed innocence-fashion on her breast between them On the glint of bare ivory-flesh shining pallid next the velvet of her bodice, hung, on a magnificent golden chain bestudded with topazes, an aggressively large and exquisitely painted miniature of the Tsar of Russia. The woman's face was far from beautiful; far more than beautiful; it possessed that divinity of difference from all the other women's faces Alexander had ever seen which made it for him the most extraordinary bewitching and alluring face in the world. She was pale with a radiant pallor, features a bit Tartaric, straight yet flat full lips, pink as coral, eyes under thick, light eyebrows shining like the topazes that blinked on her bosom.

She looked like a moth, a strange note of wildness subdued her and held her prisoner, fluttering maybe in irked enforcement amid this sea of other tame women in their blue and green and red and yellow and white, and multitudinous rainbow fallals.

Her companion, she had but one, was a man, or a boy —it was difficult to determine which—a being at any rate of the liveliest temperament, with jet black curls worn clustering around his bright vermilion painted cheeks; evening clothes, it is true, but with much savagery in the way of a scarlet satin cravat, jewelled pins, chains, rings, and a bracelet of wrought iron, delicate as a girl's bauble, encircled with a pigmy watch, set in diamonds between its links.

This fat, white, braceleted hand was raised most of the time holding an opera-glass, which, at the moment that the Tsar had levelled his and caught glimpses of the moth-like girl, the painted boy handed to her, whispering:

"Take the glasses and look at him well."

She took it, and the rays of light from the electric globes above them in the centre of the ceiling became entangled in these two glasses, held by the Tsar of Russia and the moth-like girl; a spark as of lightning's fire was emitted by the contact, and both the man and the woman dropped their arms as if struck by some power stronger than either of them.

Alexander of Russia sat bolt upright now, with no more languidness in look or mien, without removing his eyes from the woman's face, he motioned with his hand that Kalitzin should approach him.

"Who is that, Kalitzin?" asked the young man in a bewildered voice, "that girl yonder in the third box to the right, all ivory and yellow and brown, with something like tiger's eyes shining round a picture on her breast. Find out for me, if you please."

General Kalitzin paused a second before he either bowed or replied to his Sovereign; a strange hesitancy was in his manner, something between fear and irresolution.

But an instant, however, and then he inclined profoundly and ventured to glance at the Tsar with an expression of interrogative curiosity on his wrinkled face.

Alexander felt it, and without turning his head he deigned to answer the unasked question with a sigh and an imperious inflation, briefly thus:

"She attracts me."

"God forbid!" exclaimed the old soldier under his breath, and with such a terrible fervour that the Ruler half-turned in his seat with something like a frown.

"Your Majesty," whispered Kalitzin with a shudder, "that is *she*."

"Yes; *that is she*," murmured Alexander half to himself, as once again his gaze is riveted on the face of the moth-like girl.

"That is she."

It is what every man, however humble or mighty, says to himself one time in his career.

Kalitzin looked at his master, his face betraying as he looked a sense of horror, anxiety, and consternation.

"Your Majesty," he continued, "that woman is the woman I told you of before we quitted Russia, to whose lot it fell, when lots were drawn, to be the assassin of your Majesty; she glories in the fate; she is here in Paris masquerading as a Russian patriotic aristocrat, so as to watch you and strike her blow at the most convenient moment; she wears ostentatiously on her bosom a miniature of your Majesty; the watchword between her and her accomplice, that red-cheeked boy who poses as her brother, is: 'When the Tsar is Crowned.' Your Majesty, now, now, now, that I am able this night to reveal to you the details of the dangers which encompass your person, I implore of you, cut short your stay in this accursed Paris. Let us begone to-morrow, nay, this very night! for nowhere—and it is I who say it—is your Majesty safe except in Petersburg." Kalitzin's voice trembled with suppressed emotion as he spoke.

The Tsar turned again half-way towards him, his countenance, notwithstanding the thick beard and moustache, was ashy pale, his eyes widened and staring.

"Her brother?" was what he said.

"God knows! most likely her lover, if such women have hearts," returned the amazed soldier impatiently. "Petro Petrovitch, one of my most trusted men, came to me this morning with the information I have just imparted to your Majesty; at three this afternoon his dead body was found in the Seine, at St. Cloud!"

Kalitzin stares at his royal master in blank astonishment, for on the Tsar's face there is not a trace of even interest as to the fate of Petro Petrovitch, and his eyes are again fastened on the moth-like girl. They are like snakes; their holes are invisible to mortal vision, their fangs are deadly, the poison they use is undiscoverable the devil himself is their aide-de-camp. "Oh, your Majesty, permit me—and forgive me for the persistency—permit me to issue your command to the suite for a secret departure from Paris this night; a diplomatic feature is easily arranged for your going; one has not too much to dread from the displeasure of a Republic." Kalitzin's large hand grasps the arms of the Ruler's chair like a vice.

"What is her name?" asks Alexander, in a curious, hushed voice.

"She goes by the name of Princess Kara Chreptovitch," is the response.

"And she lives?"

"At number 28, Cours la Reine."

"And you know nothing more than you have said?"

Kalitzin shakes his hoary head.

"Nothing as yet; we shall have to spill a man's blood each day in sacrifice to their diabolical methods in order to find out."

"She has baffled you, then?" remarks the Ruler.

"I confess it," returns the old man. "All I know I have told your Majesty; those two wretches yonder laugh

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in derision when the words: 'When the Tsar is crowned' reach their ears; and they and every one of the three millions—yes, your Majesty, three millions—of Nihilists scattered over your dominions and over the world, laugh in scorn when they read those words, when they hear those words now burning on the lips of the civilised globe; they swear that the coronation shall never take place; they swear that yonder fiend, with your image blazing on her breast, will strike you dead."

"Ah—h!"

It is something between a gasp and a sigh that parts the Tsar's lips as at last, his eyes still fixed, as were hers on him, on the moth-like girl, he says:

"Kalitzin, you may issue orders for a secret departure from Paris to-night, immediately on our reaching the hotel after the opera."

"Your Majesty, thank God!" The tears almost glisten in the old soldier's eyes.

"Once in Russia, once in Petersburg, far from that wretches' den, Geneva, and I am master of the situation, safe sure. But not here, not here, within range of that ivory-looking woman."

Alexander gives a dismissing nod.

During the last act he sits, still watching the moth-like girl, and now, too, the painted boy.

She looked like a moth.

* * * *

By two o'clock, that is about three hours after the last notes of *Carmen* had died out in the opera-house of Paris, five carriages and several horsemen, twelve soldiers of the Russian Imperial Guard, twenty gens-d'armes and a miscellaneous following of grooms, servants and luggage quitted the Hotel Continental for the Gare du Nord.

By the time the cavalcade, which aroused not the slightest interest in the few revelers, street-sweepers, and early market-men whom it encountered, had reached the railway station, the dim film of violet irridescence, humid harbinger of the dawn, stole up the horizon, crept across the rim, curled in the tops of the chestnut flowers, wakened the birds, drew the scent from the earth and grass on the Cours la Reine, that matchless avenue, and at last, violet melting into golden arms of risen sun, night marrying with day, the Hymen-torch of their nuptials struck the gilded cupola of the Invalides, and kissed the sky into rosy joy at birth of yesterday's to-morrow.

At one of the windows of number twenty-eight, a white hand opened the lattice, disclosing the moth-like girl standing in her night apparel, breathing in the pungent air of the unsullied morning; the lace at her bosom fluttered back with the breeze, revealing the golden chain, another miniature of the Tsar; her dull locks were pushed behind her little ears and fell forlornly in two rough braids to her knees; she put her hand up and shaded her eyes from the glint of fierce coppery light which struck them from the dome of the Invalides; she bent listening, for a sharp sound, as of the click of a cane on the pavement, attracted her; she leaned to look out, and beheld the painted boy coming glibly in the *porte-cochère*. Then she withdrew, and pulled a dressing-gown of red cloth over her white one, pinned up her braids and glided to the door of the room, opened it, and, meeting him on the landing, drew him in with anxious and imperious gestures.

"Well, my princess!" cried he, with a fawn's grin on his fat face as he ran his plump fingers through his well-oiled curls and cast the yellow *béret* on the sofa.

"Hast no word for me after my absence? no welcome?"

"Liof Mouravief, I have told thee a million times I will have no words or thoughts for thee or any other man until this human vampire"—the moth-girl holds up the Tsar's miniature as she speaks—"lies dead by this hand. What hast thou found out since I parted from thee at the opera-house? I am in a fever of impatience; time hangs heavy on my hands until I can set the trap and catch the Imperial ermine. Oh, now that I have seen him, gazed upon his flesh and bone, my

The moth-like girl standing in her night apparel.

nerve is steadier for the deed, my heart happier, my whole being the more intensely, irrevocably absorbed in the fulfilment of my oath."

The moth-like girl is pacing up and down the room, her hand is clenched on the Tsar's miniature as to cause the gems encrusting the frame to cut into her tender fingers. She pauses under the chandelier; the candles are still lighted, albeit spluttering to their end; she raises her arms above her head, her eyes uplifted as she goes on:

"Oh, my Russia, my Russia, my frozen, bitten, whipped, oppressed country! bleeding and sweating at every pore with the thin blood of starved, tortured men, women and children; howling with the million cracked, parched throats that choke in the mines of Siberia; with the million backs breaking back into mother earth under the sting of the lash that goads you because you have dared raise voice against the despot who sits upon a throne of gold; my people shrieking with your more than million tongues to me, to all of us, to save, to rescue, to avenge you; I would stick spurs of steel red hot into my very heart did I now not quiver with impatience for the moment when I may enmesh, crush, kill the tyrant whose hand is against and never for you!"

She has dropped upon her knees, still holding the Tsar's portrait up before her.

The painted boy looks at her, shrugs his shoulders, sighs, and then, crossing to the open window, he closes it sharply, blows out the dying candles, lights fresh ones, picks up a sponge, wets it with Colonge and water and washes the rouge off his face; he also removes his curls, so black and loving, leaving himself thereafter a man, pale, golden-haired, sombre, with eyes of blue fire, devouring in speechless greediness the beauty of the moth-like girl.

He approaches her now, and lays his hand upon her head.

She shakes off his touch, and in a harsh voice she cries out:

"Liof Mouravief, I tell thee no man shall touch me until I have accomplished my mission. What news have you? Where sups he to-night? How soon wilt thou snap the pretty bracelet on my wrist? How soon may I set the watch in motion and throw it—away? Tell me?"

Liof Mouravief turns moodily off.

"Alexander and his suite quitted Paris two hours ago; their——"

"What! and the deed not yet done!"

"Their destination Petersburg. The information brought them by that wretch Petrovitch—by-the-way, he is dead—has set them agog. Kalitzin's eyes were upon us."

"Us! and has he found ways to discover that I am aught save the Princess Chreptovitch?"

"He has; while you were staring at the Tsar last night the Tsar was staring at you, and no doubt Kalitzin at his elbow was identifying you for his master's benefit."

The girl pauses.

"Well, what of it? We will never come in contact. If he has returned to Russia we can do the same; our passports are unimpeachable; our credentials perfect; and, by the living God"—she again holds up the miniature—"I swear that if these eyes once again behold the tyrant they shall not quit their gaze till his are sightless in death.

"Liof!" she whispers, "we have wasted too much time already; do you make the preparation for our departure on to-morrow night, and before I live another hour without it, give me the bracelet, here, clasp it on my arm, let me eat, sleep, move, knowing that the little dainty bomb, light as a diamond, easily thrown as a flower, is where I can reach it, use it at a second's warning."

Liof shook his head angrily; he loved this woman and was biding his time to make her his wife.

"I will keep it until the time comes," he says sternly; "that is part of my duty."

"You will give it to me now," she says, gritting her white fox teeth together, and adding, with that celestial smile upon her face, which such women have: "If you love me, as I am sure you do."

He transferred the death-dealing bauble to her wrist, blessing fate for the chance to finger that adorable white arm.

That evening the Princess Kara Chreptovitch received as usual on Thursdays. A great crowd of clever people were always to be found in her salon last winter, you will easily remember if you chanced to have been then in Paris; personages, many of them in the social, literary, art and dramatic worlds, others to fill in; clever men and women, too, but indistinctive, each glad to be there in the house of the original Princess, who was so enthusiastic in her patriotic devotion to her Tsar.

She stood there now, her yellow hair once more looped

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in those strange little wings, and sprayed and woven into meshy mosses at the back; a little coronet of topazes glimmered on top of it, and she was dressed in the national sarafan, the loose, square-necked, sleeveless gown of yellow satin worn over a full-sleeved yellow caltin chemise, thin woven yellow sandals on her feet and long yellow gloves on her hands; the miniature of the Tsar shone on her bosom, and the painted boy, posing cheerily as her brother, flitted near her.

There was music, something half barbaric, sensuous, sweet, sounding out from the rear of the ante-room; everyone was chattering with much laughter and gaiety, when the servant entered and approached Kara Chreptovitch with a card and a great heavy heap of purple sweetness on his salver.

She took the card, and the scent of the violets greeted her as if one with the lusciousness of the music.

She read the name.

"Alexis Tzof," and beneath was written: "A fellow-countryman, a stranger, a sympathiser, begs the honour of permission to pay his respects to the Princess Kara Chreptovitch."

In an instant the painted boy was beside her; he had read the card, thrown it in the fire, the flame of suspicion which is the familiar of such people leaping to his face, and the violets went after the card, he standing between Kara and the fire, not to be surprised if an explosion should follow.

But none did.

Nothing worse occurred than that the stranger, possibly tired of waiting in the ante-room, now entered the salon, and made his way directly to the hostess.

Alexis Tzof was a young man noticeable above others, not on account of his height, which was great, or the splendour of his physique, or the perfection of his toilette, or his beauty, but for his atmosphere, which was unique, commanding, demanding and obtaining pre-eminence wherever he was. He was fair, with a face as smooth as a girl's and as strong as a lion's whelp, beautiful white teeth and eyes of tourmaline; they rested with an expression most caressing upon Kara's face, and instantly she felt a shiver of curious thrillingness pass over her; he bent his head, took her hand in his large, strong, white one, raised it to his lips—as he did so the rays from a cat's-eye which he wore upon his finger met those of the diamonds surrounding the Princess's portrait of the Tsar—the flash seemed electric—it smote Kara and half blinded her; she stood nerveless, passive, resistless, while the newcomer, well-watched by Liof Mouravief, spoke.

What did he say?

Such things as all women love to hear. That unseen he had gazed upon her, followed her, shadowed her, unable to obtain presentation, he had at last in desperation resolved to this means of gaining her acquaintance; that he was amply prepared to satisfy her and her brother as to his identity and qualifications and so forth and so on.

Kara Chreptovitch listened as one listens in dreams that are sweet, dreading the awakening; thereafter all the evening her guests float before her as misty creatures, films dwarfed into nonentities by this surpassing being so full of strength, possessiveness, power, newness.

The painted boy was uneasy and alert; he thought he detected beneath all this paraphernalia a secret emissary of Kalitzin's, and he was very wary.

As one by one finally almost the last of the company were leaving, he contrived to convey as much to Kara.

She started, rubbing her eyes as a child disturbed in its refreshing sleep.

The last person has now quitted the salon except Tzof; he too was at the door, but he turned with a quick and gallant motion and was beside Kara; the painted boy, keen for mischief, had his hand on his pistol in his little pocket, while the stranger spoke.

"Excellent, sir," Tzof said quietly, while a faint smile of amusement played upon his full red lips, "delay a little; I assure you with me you will have no use for your weapon."

The painted boy still held it fast, however; conspirators are firm believers in the universality of conspiracies.

"Madame," with a profound inclination before the Princess, "I have noted both here and everywhere that I have had the honour to behold you, that you wear the portrait of the man they call the Tsar of Russia," an inflection a trifle sad, a trifle supercilious strokes the ears of his two listeners.

"Madame, I have of late been in Geneva;" his voice lowers to a mere whisper as he glanced round cautiously, for at the mention of that Swiss city both Kara and Liof could not forbear a start of bewilderment and apprehension.

"There," continued Tzof, "where you frequented not

Kara Chreptovitch listened as one listens in dreams.

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Falling on his knees before her.

long since, I, too, have been familiar. I mean in the small shops of Serge Prost in the Rue Sturm."

The eyes of Kara and Liof dart against each other like the play of criss-cross lightning.

"The words you have heard I, too, have listened to." Now his tones sunk even lower, and articulation is scarcely more than mere breathing.

"When the Tsar is crowned," murmurs Alexis Tzof, fixing his peculiar orbs on the face of Kara Chreptovitch.

The painted boy takes his hand from his pocket.

The Princess shudders as her glance is dissolved in his, absorbed by his, shudders with the perfect heretofore unknown bliss of actual vital, divine loving.

And the three sat there with close-drawn curtains late into the night, even until once more the dawn pricks all the east with rose and quenches the stars and reawakens the world to its new round of labour and sweat.

* * * *

It had been planned by the Princess and Liof Mouravief to quit Paris for Petersburg the night following the Tsar's sudden departure; it has been told how anxious was Kara Chreptovitch to go, to place herself at once within reach of her intended victim.

Very well; but they did not quit Paris. So often does it happen that the desire of yesterday burns out in the flames of to-day's fire.

The painted boy was for departure.

The Princess made excuse of not being well; he stared; she was unresponsive, languid, indolent, lying at length on her lounge, full of absent-mindedness, with lowered lids.

Alexis Tzof came again that evening, and while she should have been journeying post-haste to the frontier, she languished amid warmth, downy cushions at her feet and head, listening to the music of his voice.

The painted boy played the piano until he was tired, and then he went out in the little garden and smoked, peeping in at the windows in jealous rage at these two, complacent, quiet content, if for no other reason than that they had at last met, where it now appeared to them that they must have been waiting to meet since the world began.

What did they speak of?

Naught but themselves, naught but that supreme theme which Adam and Eve, making primal awakening in one another's arms, found sweeter than any other ever to be mentioned again.

This went on for a fortnight.

Always the Petersburg journey put off; always Alexis Tzof each day and evening too. Always the painted boy a little dull, but watchful and patient till now.

He raged up and down in front of her, his light eyes swimming in tears of anger and passion.

"I tell you it must stop. I will not have it; you are betrothed to me; you are bound by a sacred vow to end the tyrant. You! once most eager to plunge the knife, to throw the little bomb there on your wrist. You! forsooth must linger on fêting and pleasuring here in Paris. Why? Because a tall man is become your hero, your slave and your master, both in one. Kara, if you do not come at once to Petersburg I will kill your lover and denounce you to the leaders at Geneva."

Lashed into a fine fury, the painted boy in his little yellow *béret* and his evening clothes—for it was now nine o'clock, and guests as usual were expected in the Princess's salon—dashed up and down, smashing a few cups and saucers *en route*.

Kara looked at him; how impotent, how silly he was;

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she shrugged her shoulders and united the iron bracelet round her arm with a smile. At last she said:

"I promise you, as the tyrant, within forty hours from to-morrow either he or I will be no more." She sighs, for Alexis Tzof has stolen all the tang and smart and bitter out of her oath. Yet she knows it must be kept.

"And me! me! What of me?" almost shrieks the painted boy at her ear.

"You!" the Princess stares at him. "You can do nothing, be nothing, say nothing, until this bracelet has done its work. Run away," she says lightly, "and play the piano and compose yourself; I hear footsteps."

The guests came; they ate and made merry.

The guests went, all save Alexis Tzof.

Kara Chreptovitch stood leaning against the marble statue of Aphrodite, her hands were clasped in front of her, her arms so encircling the portrait of the Tsar. She was looking down; she trembled; she knew that the wonderful divine moment of life had come; she knew that unspeakable joy stepped across her threshold, entering in, and giving her new birth as Tzof drew near to her.

"Kara," he whispered, "Kara, beloved one, it is something with you as it is with me, is it not? Speak, sweet love, and say to me that thou lovest me one tithe as well as I love thee? Oh, 'tis not love, my worshipped lady," cries he, falling on his knees before her and reaching up to clasp her slender waist. "It is idolatry; for thee I would throw away a world; for thee I would resign all that men crave; for thee honour, life, kingdoms, principalities; all weigh as nothing. Speak to me, my dove, one word!"

"I love thee—but my oath, my mission too long have tarried; this night must see me on the way to Petersburgh to fulfil my destiny."

"And thou canst talk of destinies when this moment makes our destinies one! Beloved, dost thou think I will allow thee to separate from me, risk thyself, who dost now belong to me?" Tzof holds the moth-like girl close to his breast with both arms about her, his eyes fixed upon her face in unutterable tenderness.

A sound comes up through the silent house; it is the creak of the painted boy's boots; the Princess breaks her bonds, stands wildly like some hunted wild thing, beaten by cruel dogs into a last unavailing court; the boots of the painted boy creak nearer.

"Oh!" cries she. "Away from me; tempt me no more, or I cannot withstand. My oath must be kept. Alexis Tzof, if I accomplish my mission and live, then I am thine own; if not, farewell."

Tzof approaches her.

"Then," he says simply, standing in the flicker of the firelight, his hand on her shoulder, "keep your oath now, this moment, for I am Alexander, the Tsar."

Smitten, blinded, stunned, she cowers at the base of the statue of Aphrodite, no whiter than she.

"Thou!" she murmurs, creeping slowly to him. "Thou!" And the music in her voice is of heaven, so touching, so tender, as she draws down his beardless face to her bosom and strokes and caresses it with cold, trembling little fingers.

"I, even I," he says, holding her to his heart.

"And I have now had thy image on my heart for eighteen long months and not to know thee when I saw thee bare of beard." All these few moments she is caressing his face, his throat, his hands.

The boots of Liof Mouravief now creak on the staircase.

The moth-like girl rises.

She drags herself the whole length of the very long room. Alexis Tzof crosses down to the other end to meet the painted boy.

He meets him.

Neither sees the woman.

She wrests the iron bracelet from her wrist, and snatching the bomb, light as a blossom, from its jewelled socket, she raises her arm and drops it, snapping, at her own feet.

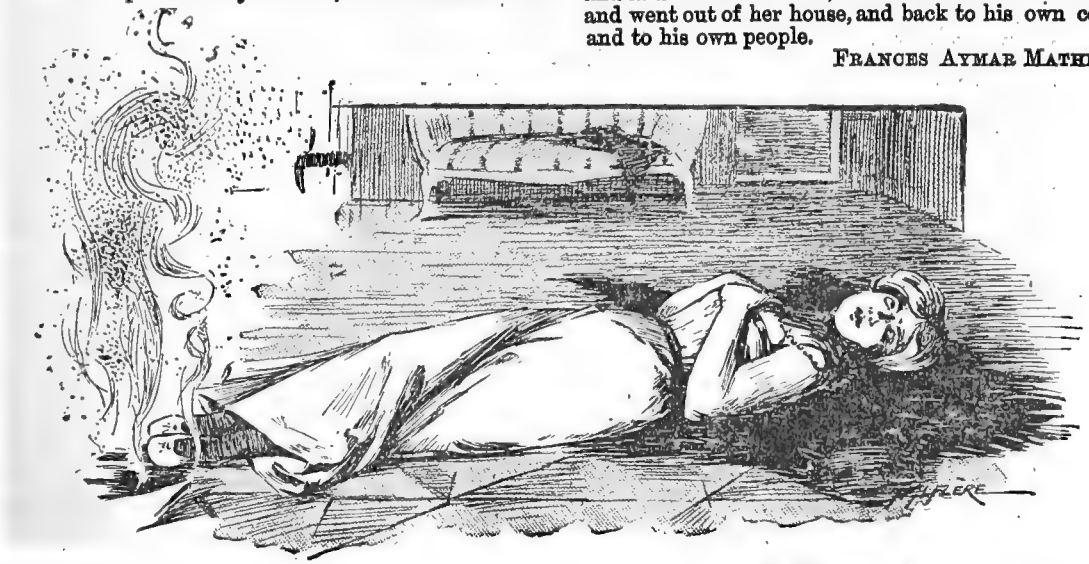
A sharp report, a dull thud, two weak woman's hands clasped on the portrait of the Tsar on her bosom.

Death lay between the two men who knelt at either side of Kara Chreptovitch.

"When the Tsar is crowned," mutters Liof Mouravief, turning over the miniature and reading the five words so engraved on it, and then beginning to weep and pray.

But Alexander the Tsar said nothing, only raised her, and laid her on the sofa, and kissed her on the mouth, and went out of her house, and back to his own country and to his own people.

FRANCES AYMAR MATHEWS.



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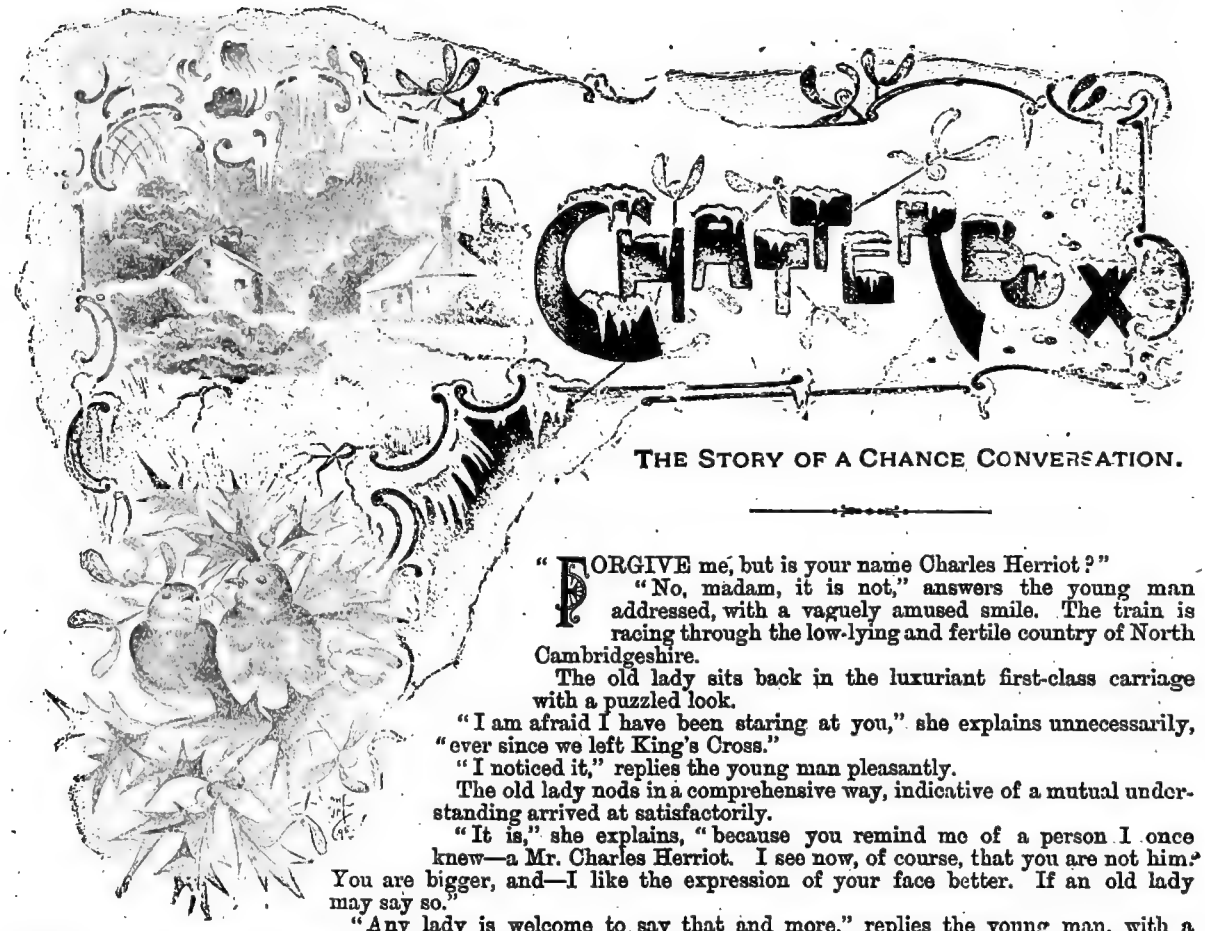

The Story of a Chance Conversation.

"Forgive me, but is your name Charles Herriot?"

"No, madam, it is not," answers the young man addressed, with a vaguely amused smile. The train is racing through the low-lying and fertile country of North Cambridgeshire.

The old lady sits back in the luxuriant first-class carriage with a puzzled look.

"I am afraid I have been staring at you," she explains unnecessarily, "ever since we left King's Cross."

"I noticed it," replies the young man pleasantly.

The old lady nods in a comprehensive way, indicative of a mutual understanding arrived at satisfactorily.

"It is," she explains, "because you remind me of a person I once knew—a Mr. Charles Herriot. I see now, of course, that you are not him. You are bigger, and—I like the expression of your face better. If an old lady may say so."

"Any lady is welcome to say that and more," replies the young man, with a twinkle in his melancholy eyes. He folds his newspaper and courageously battles with an air of resignation, which, nevertheless, is quite obvious. No more of *Pearson's Magazine* for him, he reflects.

"I am very glad it is only a resemblance. Dear me, what a pace this train is going at! I hope the engine-driver is sober. I am glad you are not Charles Herriot, because I do not approve of him. He is a young man I dislike intensely. A young man whom, if I were a man instead of an old woman, I should want to kick."

"If I can be of any use to you,——" begins the young man, and is interrupted by a laugh which is wonderfully silvery still, despite the silver hair.

"No thank you. I dare say that fate will do it for me. He has retired from the precincts of my life—for ever, I hope. He never did me any harm. Why is that engine-driver whistling so annoyingly? Do you think he sees a train in front?"

"I hope not."

"No, he never did me any harm, but he spoiled the life of the dearest girl I know, just to gratify his own vanity. Oh, the vanity of you men!"

The young man has opened the paper again. He is studying the heading of the article on palmistry with a vague smile.

"He was rich—disgustingly rich—and I suppose he fell in love with the dear girl according to his lights. She refused him. I admire her spirit still when I think of it, for she had everyone against her. Even her own mother, the very person who ought to have saved her from him. Oh, some women are horrid! Have you a mother?"

"Yes."

"I am glad to hear of it. I am a very old woman, so you need not be afraid of my curiosity. I never repeat anything—never gossip—never, never. That whistle again! I am glad your mother is still alive. She must be proud of you. Respect her. I always tell young men that. I should like to warn young women—against their own mothers. But it wouldn't do. I never make mischief. I know a great deal about my neighbours. But I am a well—a perfect well."

The young man is looking up from his newspaper. The twinkle is in his naturally melancholy eyes again.

"I was telling you about Charles Herriot—wasn't I?"

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"Yes."

The melancholy eyes drop suddenly to the magazine again.

"Well, he could not get her by fair means, so he tried—the other thing. He engaged the mother—horrid woman—on his side. He persecuted poor Edith till her life was a burden to her. He did mean things. He spread reports that they were engaged. A 'cad,' I call him. Did you say anything?"

"No; I only coughed."

"But you have no business to cough. What can your mother be thinking of? Now, you take my advice and buy some black currant lozenges, or perhaps it's stomach?"

"Perhaps!" admits the young man gravely.

"Well, you know, there was somebody else all the time—the poor girl was breaking her heart for him. I know it; she told me. I cannot remember his name now. Reginald—Reginald somebody or other. The great booby believed what he heard, and never moved a finger. The girl could not go and tell him that she loved him—or it was some idiotic idea of honour—not spoiling sport, or whatever they call it. Men are so stupid. So he went away—to the Cape, or somewhere. It was only the day before yesterday I saw her, poor girl. She looked quite old—it was four years ago—but very sweet and pretty. She is living with her horrid mother in town. The train is going to stop, isn't it? I hope they will get another engine-driver."

"I hope so," says the young man gravely.

"Oh!" goes on the chatterbox, "I remember now who he was. His name was Herriot, too—Reginald Herriott—his younger brother. What station is this?"

"Peterboro'."

"But you are not going to get out?"

"Yes," answers the young man gravely, collecting his possessions; "I am. I am going back to town from here—by the next train."

"I am sorry," says the old lady graciously. "We were having such a pleasant journey. But perhaps we may meet again."

"I hope so," says the young man from the platform.

"Oh, the train is going. Good-bye. Come and see me in London; my name is Faneuil—Lady Faneuil."

"And mine is Reginald Herriot. Good-bye."

"Oh!"

MADGE MORRIS.

Key to Jumble Story No. 24. See page 62.

1	91	52	36	101	20	65	37	121
2	71	49	13	78	109	77	116	98
3	83	47	105	58	106	23	114	122
4	84	96	99	17	119	34	73	81
11	62	12	48	57	15	117	97	88
31	19	79	16	102	72	33	112	74
25	40	29	100	44	111	94	110	5
14	69	32	63	21	115	41	103	6
18	24	9	68	51	64	27	95	30
43	66	10	42	53	86	118	59	55
54	26	75	50	107	60	87	76	
70	92	93	90	108	80	104	113	
85	45	61	35	28	7	39	120	
22	46	82	38	89	8	67	56	

OWING to the Christmas Holidays, this number of *Short Stories* goes to press before the result of Jumble Story No. 25 is known. The names of the winners will appear next week.

Whose Hand?

A £10 Prize.

In the New Year's number of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, now on sale, appears a most interesting article, in which

NINE TYPICAL HANDS

are delineated by an expert palmist.

George Alexander, Sir Walter Besant, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, a Typical Criminal, the Lord Chief Justice, Dr. Parker, G. R. Sims, W. T. Stead, and Sir Evelyn Wood have been good enough to allow us to take photographs of their hands, and from these photographs the palmist made her delineations.

The process was this: Photographs of (say) Mr. George Alexander's hand were taken in four or more different positions, and forwarded to the palmist, who "read" the photographs *without having any idea as to the ownership of the hands.* The same method was pursued in each case.

Thus, altogether, we had collected forty or fifty hand-photographs. Fifteen of these were selected haphazard and embodied in the heading of the article. We now ask you to say to whom each of these hands belongs, and we offer a cheque for £10 to the first person who is successful in this task.

Competitors have the following information to guide them:

(1.) Each of the fifteen hands depicted in the heading belongs to one of the nine persons above mentioned.

(2.) The palmist's readings and a hand of each of the nine persons is reproduced in the article.

From the lines and other features of these nine hands, and the palmist's readings, an accurate idea of the characteristics of the various hands can be obtained, and it will thus be possible to distinguish the ownership of each hand. An outlined numbered diagram is reproduced herewith.

Competitors are requested to write on a sheet of paper their name and address, and the numbers one to fifteen down the left-hand side of the sheet, and opposite each number the name of the person who is, in their opinion, the owner of the corresponding hand.

Buy a copy of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE with all haste and set your wits to work.

The first person sending the correct solution takes the £10.

The diagram at the head of this notice must accompany each attempt.

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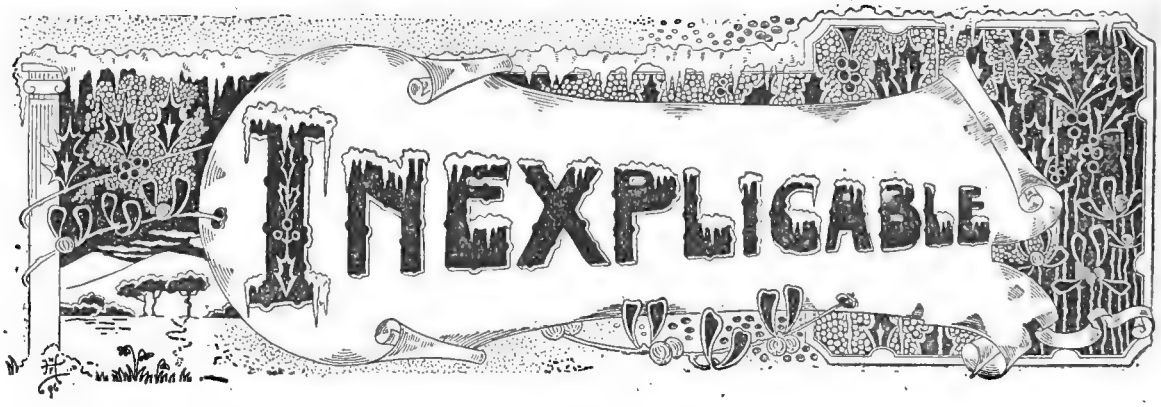

In an interval of a busy professional life, I sit down to record a series of remarkable events.

Remarkable they unquestionably were in themselves, but more especially so from the manner in which they came within my experience. Though the part I played in connection with them was, from the first to last, little more than that of a spectator, yet it will, I think, be granted that there was something strange, something inexplicable, in the manner in which that part was again and again thrust upon me, and always, it would appear, to qualify me for helping to bring about a certain result.

In the month of December, many years ago, I came up to London to spend my Christmas. I was but nineteen, and had never set foot in the great city before. My desire to see it was intense, and to gratify this, a friend—Jack Halford we will call him—had asked me to share the grimy hospitality of Barnard's Inn during pantomime time.

"You must not expect to live luxuriously, or to fare sumptuously," he had written. "The inn of Barnard is severe as to lodgment, and scaly as to catering. It is congenial to the tastes of the Eremite rather than to those of the Sybarite; but lendeth itself not unkindly to him who would 'see life.' Come up on the 23rd. By that time I shall have returned from a few day's idling in Kent, for which I am now preparing."

Acting literally on the terms of my friend's invitation, I started from Derbyshire on the 23rd, and arrived in town, cold, hungry, and wretched, long after dark that night. Knowing nothing of London, I took a cab, and drove direct to Barnard's Inn. On my arrival a porter confronted me, and I asked for my friend.

"Out of town. Down in Kent."

That was his answer. "But he expected me," I urged. "I could, of course, get admission to his rooms?"

The porter shook his head. He had not the keys. The laundress was at home—no doubt a-bed. He had received no orders to admit anybody to Mr. Halford's chambers; in fact, it would be more than his place was worth to do so.

Eventually he consented to take charge of my luggage, and, on his advice, I set out in search of a hotel where I might get a bed for the night.

There were plenty of hotels in Holborn; but as the street was agreeably bright and lively for the hour, I thought I would walk a little and take my choice of them. Perhaps I was not without some faint hope that I might encounter Halford, who I felt little doubt would return that night. At all events, I wandered away, got out of the main streets, grew bewildered, and eventually asked my way of a man who turned out to be the boots of what he described as a most respectable inn, one of the oldest in London, where, he assured me, I could receive every accommodation.

The house was unquestionably old. It had also a dingy and forlorn aspect; but I was hungry and tired, and glad to avail myself of supper, with the prospect of a bed to follow. So I allowed myself to be enticed into the place, and along a dark passage, into a wretched hole of a room at the back, which had the sole merit of being unoccupied.

It had a floor that shelved down towards the great fireplace, wide and draughty, and a low ceiling, shelving also, and threatening to fall, in spite of the two huge beams which sustained it. A century of smokers had contributed to the indescribable odour that pervaded it.

Two candles in frames burned against the walls, and there was probably an idea that the room benefited from a lamp in the passage, which could be dimly descried through certain panes of ground-glass in the room door, which bore the legend "Coffee Room"—quite as a matter of fancy, seeing that coffee had obviously never been drunk there within the memory of living man.

A poor supper, a glass of something hot, and to bed—to bed in a close, stuffy back room, with a look-out comprising the back windows of a row of houses stretching away further than I could see. Never had I seen so villainous a room.

Tired as I was, sleep seemed impossible; but I threw myself on the hard bed in the hope that it might at least give me rest. In that hope I put out the light; but no sooner had I done so than my brain, warmed into activity by the glass I had taken, began to exert itself in distressing speculations. What, I asked myself, was the character of the house into which I had ventured so imprudently? Was I safe? Should I be robbed, ill-treated, murdered?

For a time I rendered myself utterly miserable through these fears and misgivings. Then I began to laugh them down, to attribute my unpleasant impressions to an ignorance of town life; and so by degrees I grew calm and inert, and sleep came upon me unawares. I closed my eyelids and sank into the most refreshing of slumbers.

From this blissful unconsciousness I was startled by a scream. Jumping up, I looked about me. All dark, all silent; yet I heard it most distinctly—a shrill, piercing scream, as if from the lips of someone in mortal agony. At first my impression was that I was not

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alone, but finding all was silent about me, I rushed to the window, raised the blind, and looked out.

At the instant I did so, my eyes encountered a frightful sight. There was a light in one of the opposite windows, and the light shone through the white blind. It shone with sufficient brilliancy to throw upon the blind the shadows of two figures. One figure was that of a woman staggering back, with long, down-loosened hair, the other, that of a man who was rushing upon the woman with a long knife, clutched like a dagger in his hand. As I gazed the knife descended, the woman fell, there was, or I fancied there was, an audible moan, then the light was extinguished suddenly, as if it had fallen or been trampled under foot, and there was nothing to distinguish that window from any other in the row.

I waited. Standing there shivering in the dark, I waited for what might happen next. For half-an-hour at least I remained at the window, but without anything further occurring. The light did not reappear. Whatever the result of the blow I had seen dealt, it had clearly aroused no one; and, though not without misgivings that I had witnessed an assassination, I at length returned to bed, and finally sank again into troubled slumber.

Late in the morning heavy steps on the stairs awoke me. Almost immediately the incident of the shadow on the blind recurred to me with intense vividness. I could see the knife, the falling woman, and the man, whose face had been so distinctly outlined that I could almost have identified his features, while I could with certainty declare that he wore a sort of forage-cap, with a projecting peak standing out straight from the forehead.

Full of this impression, I darted to the window and looked out. Unfortunately I looked in vain. There were many windows in the row of houses, all alike, and nearly all had the blinds down. The consequence was that I could not even tell in which I had witnessed the deed of the previous night.

This uncertainty had one effect; with the impetuousity of youth, I burned to communicate what I had witnessed; but I felt that it was hardly likely I should meet with such credit when I could not even point out the house in which what I described had happened. People would, not unnaturally, conclude that I had been dreaming.

With this impression I descended to the miserable room in which I had dined over-night, and ordered breakfast. Several persons were present, each engaged on his morning meal, and I looked from one to the other in the firm conviction that presently some allusion to a murder in the neighbourhood would greet my ears. In this I was disappointed; all were silent. So I imitated their example, held my peace, and breakfasted as best I might.

The meal was over, and I sat propping my chin in the hollow of one hand, and staring vacantly at the glazed door, with the lamp still burning in the passage outside it, when I suddenly involuntarily started and cried. The cause was simply this: as I looked I saw the shadow of a face cast by the lamp on the ground-glass! It was the face of someone stealing noiselessly along the passage, and to my amazement I recognised it as the same face I had beheld over-night—the face of the man who had dealt the blow! I could swear to the features, and, still more, I could not be mistaken in the identity of the peaked cap.

Acting solely on impulse, I darted out of the room, and made my way along the passage; but, in place of the assassin of whom I was in pursuit, encountered only the waiter who had attended to my wants in the coffee-room. He was an old, ill-favoured man in greasy black, and with a wisp of dirty linen about his neck to match the napkin over his arm.

At sight of me he thrust out his arms.

"No you don't!" he exclaimed aggressively.

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "Who is the man who has just quitted this passage?"

"Man!" he ejaculated. "Oh, yes! I dare say; we've heard that before. That's a stale game, that is!"

I expressed my astonishment and inability to comprehend his meaning. Of that, however, he did not leave me long in doubt.

"Oh, we understand," he remarked injuriously. "You ain't the fust by long chalks as 'ave tried on that game, comin' here without a bit or mossel of luggage! gettin' of your supper, bed, and breakfast, and then all of a sudden there's a man passin' the winder, or there's a 'pintruent in the City, or a somethink or another, and off you goes! And we may hook for the bill, we may. Oh yes; we know! Not this time. Not if we're aweer of it!"

The effect of this imputation of swindling motives so overwhelmed me that I had not a word to offer in explanation or defence. I simply paid my bill and quitted the house, which, as I saw on emerging into the street, was called the "Green Posts."

Hastening off to Barnard's Inn, I had the satisfaction of finding that Halford had returned, and was full of apologies for the inconvenience he had caused me. Later in the day I confided to him the adventure in which his absence had involved me. He listened; but attached no great importance to what I had seen.

"Stabbings and things of that sort are constantly happening in London," he said. "There isn't a night without its dozen murders. However, I know the "Green Posts," up Gray's Inn Road way, and we'll go this evening and see if you can find the house where this happened."

This suggestion entirely jumped into my views, and after dinner we set out. found the house I had slept at, and the street adjoining it. And, indeed, it would have been strange had we not found the latter, for it was full of people in the utmost state of excitement. There were, moreover, fire-engines in it, others were momentarily arriving, and a great glare of flame irradiated the sky. A house was on fire, and I had a conviction that it was the very house in which I had seen the murderous deed perpetrated. I was for giving information to the authorities, but Halford dissuaded me.

"Doubtless the body of the woman is consumed," he said; "the house having in all probability been fired with that object. You would only bring yourself into unenviable notoriety for no purpose."

So I remained silent, though the fire intensified my suspicions that I had witnessed the perpetration of a cowardly murder.

* * * * *

Years passed away. Halford had risen in his profession, but still hung to his gloomy stronghold in Barnard's Inn. I had spent many a jovial hour there in those halcyon days which prelude the stern realities of medical life, the days sacred to that most joyous of human pursuits—the walking of hospitals! I had succeeded to my father's practice, and lived in the old house, in the quiet old Derbyshire market town, which our family had inherited for two hundred years.

One night, on returning from a long professional

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round, I received a letter in a woman's hand, entreating me to come up to London without loss of time. Halford, the writer said, was ill—she feared dying. The letter bore a signature, but I could only decipher "Joanna"; the rest was a mere blur.

The next night found me at Barnard's Inn. My coming had been eagerly looked for, the porter told me, and, in confirmation of this, I was received at the door of Jack's chambers by a young woman, who, on seeing me, uttered an exclamation of gratitude, and thanked me again and again for my kindness in coming.

"I have the pleasure of addressing Joanna?" I inquired.

She blushed, and dropped her eyelids in acquiescence. She had darkly-fringed lids, and tears like dewdrops glistened on the fringes. A pretty, sweet-faced woman altogether was Joanna; one whom it was impossible not to admire, and it might have been easy to love to distraction.

After admitting that I was right in calling her Joanna, she said no more of herself, but, drawing me aside, explained what had happened to Halford. "It was very mysterious," she said, shuddering as she spoke, "but while coming home from a friend's a few nights before, he had been shot at and severely wounded."

"Shot at!" I ejaculated with genuine surprise. "Attacked—robbed—I suppose?"

"No. Simply shot at from a doorway; the man, seeing him fall, ran away."

"And where was this?"

"In Red Lion Square."

"Strange! The object must have been robbery."

She shook her head, and was then seized with so violent a tremour that she had to clutch at a chair to save herself. Then she further informed me that the effect of the shot had been very serious, from a difficulty in extracting the ball, which had, however, been happily accomplished that morning. Since then there had been a slight improvement.

I found my friend ill, very ill; but did not despair of his life. He was quite insensible, and remained so some days. During that time I stayed in town; in fact, I protracted my stay long enough to satisfy myself that he was out of danger. My companion in the sick-room was Joanna, whose intelligence I found to equal her beauty. We talked much of Jack, and I saw that she was devoted to him; but she did not say a word about herself, or the relations between them, and the subject was so delicate that I dared not question her upon it. One singular observation, and one only, she let slip; it was to the effect that it was hard he should suffer all this for her sake.

That phrase struck me at the time, and haunted me, both on my homeward journey and long afterwards. What did it mean?

In a month or so, Jack had recovered sufficiently to write and thank me for coming up to him; but he made no allusion to the attack, which had been attended with consequences so serious, and, more singular still, there was no word of Joanna, from one end of the letter to the other.

To those engaged in professional duties, time flies. So three or four years might have gone by before the incident with which I opened this narrative was suddenly and strikingly recalled to my memory.

I had gone to France for a few weeks' change, and was travelling between Amiens and Paris, on the then newly-opened railway, when at one of the sharp curves in the line our train ran off the rails. Several of the carriages were overturned, and one was smashed to atoms. In that one carriage several persons were riding, and all were more or less injured. The severest sufferer was an Englishman—Jasper Nuttall—as I gathered from his card-case; for immediately on learning what had happened, I went to his assistance.

The man was very much shaken; two of his ribs were broken, and he had received some internal injury which caused blood to flow from his mouth. His own conviction was that he would not recover, and his horror of death was childish in its exaggeration. For this, however, I soon learnt there was a cause. After binding me by a solemn oath not to divulge what I was about to hear while he lived, he intrusted me with a confession of a most serious nature. This was the substance of it.

The name that he bore was not his true name, he said; what that was did not matter, as he had not used it for many years. The occasion of his abandoning it was this: He had spent his early life as a midshipman in the Royal Navy, and while on shore, during a month's leave, he had been introduced to a young lady, who, though eighteen years of age, was still at a boarding-school at Canterbury, her parents having died while she was an infant. A fierce, consuming passion for this beautiful girl took possession of him; but she did not encourage his advances, her heart being already given to another, who was secretly paying her his addresses.

Such, however, was the Jasper's ardour that he gave her no peace, and followed her up with such indiscretion that the school authorities discovered the connection, and talked of expulsion.

Terrified at this threat—fearing also that by what had happened becoming known she should compromise herself with her lover beyond forgiveness—the girl, in a foolish moment, consented to elope with Jasper Nuttall; and in a few days they were privately married. But, directly the ceremony was performed, the girl repented of her rash act, and, seizing an opportunity, ran away from the husband of an hour.

Exasperated beyond measure, the narrator proceeded, he followed his wife up to London; he ascertained, after awhile, that she was in hiding in a low lodging in a questionable neighbourhood; he found out also that she had written to her old lover, to what effect he knew not; and on the night of making these discoveries he went to the house she was concealed in, found a means of entrance, and suddenly presented himself before the terrified woman, who caught up a table-knife to defend herself with. This he snatched from her, and, maddened with drink, passion, and jealousy, he, on her irritating him, by a refusal to explain or go elsewhere with him, plunged it into her heart. That done, he left the house as secretly as he had entered it, but did not quit the neighbourhood.

All that night and the succeeding day he loitered about to see what would happen, expecting every moment to be seized and denounced as a murderer. But all that day passed, and nothing happened. At nightfall, an idea took possession of his maddened brain. He determined to fire the house in which he had committed the murder, so as to hide all traces of his crime.

"And this hideous purpose you carried into execution," I interrupted. "I remember it perfectly."

"You remember?" he asked aghast.

"Certainly; I saw the murder committed."

So astounded was the poor wretch at these words—so astounded and overcome with mingled pain and terror—

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that he fainted. In that state he was removed to a cottage in the neighbourhood; and when the train was ready to carry those of us able to travel on to Paris, I left him, with the firm impression that his eyes would never open again in this world.

* * * * *

The fact that this revelation should have been made to me—to me of all human beings—impressed me so strongly, that on my return to England I wrote to Jack Halford, giving him an account of what had happened, as far as I felt myself justified in doing so; dwelling on the singularity of our old mystery being cleared up after so many years; and adding that, now the unhappy wretch was dead and gone, it was well that his secret should die with him.

To this I received an immediate reply, expressing surprise, and asking whether the name of the dead man was not Jasper Nuttall. My astonishment at the question was great; but I had no reason to withhold the information from my old friend, and I answered in the affirmative.

For at least three months after I heard no more of Jack; then he wrote, informing me that he was about to give up the old chambers and the old life; to tear himself from the blandishments of the Inn of Barnard, and to take unto himself a partner in life's transport and tribulations. The lady's name, he informed me, was Joanna Hilders, orphan daughter of the late Captain Hilders, a lady whom I would recollect having met at the inn some years ago.

At last, then, the murder was out; Joanna was to be his wife. I certainly resented not having been taken into their confidence before; but an invitation to the wedding made amends (though I was unable to accept it), and I was not sorry to know that dear Jack was at last comfortably married and settled.

The next Christmas, Mr. and Mrs. Jack, as we called them, came down to Derbyshire on a visit, and so pleasant did this prove that the experiment was tried on the following Christmas. Mrs. Jack was, as I have intimated, a pretty, lovable woman, and I often wondered where he had met with her. It leaked out that he had known her some years; and that was about all I was able to learn.

During this second visit the weather was fine, and we rode out most days. On the afternoon preceding Christmas Eve we took a long drive, and, while going through a lane bordered with trees, a trifling but rather singular incident occurred.

The lady suddenly cried out: "Oh, Jack! Jack!" and pointed in the direction in which she was looking, her face being of intense alarm.

Jack inquired what was the matter, and she in reply whispered in his ear.

Thereupon he looked serious; but instantly shook off the feeling, and said, with a smile: "Joanna is constantly fancying likenesses in strangers to people we have met. Did you observe anything peculiar in the stranger under the tree we last passed?"

I had not even observed a stranger; I said so, and there the matter dropped.

That evening we sat round the fire in our old-fashioned living-room. The lamp was not lit, but the piled logs sent out a strong glare, and it was pleasant, in the flickering uncertain light, to see the stars shine through the windows, and to listen to the ringing of distant church-bells, borne in fitful gusts on the breeze.

Suddenly we were all startled by a crash. One of the casement windows had been burst in, and, looking round, I saw a man leap into the room. He was ragged in his dress, with shock hair, a white face, and fiercely-burning eyes. Staggering forward, he threw up his arms, and uttered a wild shriek.

"My wife!" he screamed; "give me my dead wife!"

In uttering these words he rushed toward Halford, but on his way stumbled against the table in the middle of the room and fell forward over it, his bare arms thrown out wildly, and his head striking on the mahogany with a sharp sound.

Both Halford and his wife startled up; but the latter, with a sacred and terrified look, dropped back into her chair.

"Jasper," she ejaculated in a tone of horror, and sank back insensible.

I caught at the name to which she had given utterance, as stepping to the table I clutched at the intruder's long hair and turned his face to the light. It presented a terrible aspect. The eyes were bright, but wild; the mouth was working convulsively.

I had little difficulty in deciding that it was the face of a maniac; but still less difficulty in recognising it as that of Jasper Nuttall, whom I had left for dead after the accident on the line between Amiens and Paris.

While I was in the act of making this discovery, there were voices and footsteps without, and several strange faces looked in at the window. They were keepers from the county lunatic asylum, in search of an escaped patient. At the sound of their voices, the wretched being before me sprang from the table, beat out wildly at the air, uttered gurgling and inarticulate sounds, and then, to our inexpressible horror, fell backwards—dead.

Rapidly all this had passed, there had been time enough for me to see, as in a flash, the connecting link between the incidents of years—between my first London experience, as above recorded, and the horror I had just witnessed. Intuitively I perceived, what I had never of course for an instant suspected, that Joanna was the object of Jasper Nuttall's affection, the girl whom he had made his wife. But he had taken her life and destroyed her body in the flames of the burning house? True, he believed that; but was it so? had the wound he had inflicted proved mortal, or had it not?

Under pretence of facilitating her restoration, I stepped up, and with a pair of scissors divided the cord that fastened Joanna's bodice. As I expected, her bosom presented traces of a stab—a deep, fiery scar.

Halford's quick eye noticed that I saw this, and that it had a significance for me. On this he—when the body of the unfortunate man had been removed by the keepers—tendered an explanation which spared me further conjecture.

His avowal was to this effect: He was Jasper Nuttall's rival, and was down at Canterbury, waiting an opportunity to see Joanna on the day of my first visit to his chambers. Although he then failed to see her, he received her letter apprising him of the false step she had taken, and imploring his forgiveness. Hence he little imagined that she was in danger; less still, of course, that it was against her I had seen a murderous hand raised, or that it was her body we suspected to have perished in the flames of the burning house. Heavens! the very idea would have driven him frantic. Fortunately, the wound inflicted had not proved mortal. The knife did not enter her heart, but passed between the two lobes of the lungs; and the people of the lodging-house, discovering what had happened in time, the unhappy girl was removed to a

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hospital, so that Nuttall's second criminal act, that of firing the house, was perpetrated in vain.

After the fire Jasper Nuttall disappeared, and for years Joanna remained in concealment, watched over by Halford, though estranged from him by her fatal marriage. No doubt the murderer, as he supposed himself to be, spent the interval at sea; but that he nursed the deadliest hatred of his rival in his heart was pretty well proved by the attempt at length made on Halford's life, for neither he nor Joanna ever doubted that it was Jasper Nuttall, who—probably—during a temporary stay in England—fired the shot which so nearly ended my friend's life.

All the while Nuttall lived Joanna's position was a most painful one; but on Halford's receiving my account of the railway accident, and the discovery it had led to, with the conclusion I had hastily jumped at, that the man was dead, he had formally proposed to his old love, and their marriage followed as a thing of course. What wonder, then, that Joanna should have been overcome with terror when that night she saw her first husband standing alive before her!

My hasty conclusion as to the impossibility of the man's surviving had, of course, done all the mischief. He had survived, but his health was shattered, and his brain, always weak and excitable, had given way, and his friends in England had placed him in the Derbyshire Asylum, from which he had that day contrived to escape.

Poor wretch! we pitied him sincerely. Jack's tender heart was moved at his miserable end, and perhaps the least touch of self-reproach prompted the tears Joanna shed at the memory of one who had loved her as deeply as he had wronged her.

For my own part, while I felt for him, I was strongly impressed by the singular bearing one upon another of the links in this strange chain of events, extending over so many years. It seemed a mere accident that I was ever concerned in the matter at all; yet but for that accident Halford and Joanna might never have been united, and Nuttall would probably have died in the asylum, his death unknown to those who from uncertainty about his fate, and terror at his probable reappearance, might have gone down to their graves nursing a hopeless and fruitless passion. The problem of their lives was happily destined to be worked out to a more blissful solution.

H. M. S.

A CHRISTMAS EPISODE.

N the evening of the twenty-fourth day of December, Mr. Herrington Seymour rang the door bell of the residence of his head book-keeper, thus making the one hundred and thirtieth time he had so heralded himself since calling to inquire as to the physical condition of the said head book-keeper on the fifteenth day of July preceding.

Not that the health of the head book-keeper longer required this attention, for he had, in fact, been back at his desk since the early part of September; but, although the illness which had laid him low was a thing of the past, the daughter who had been his nurse-in-chief was still a present fact, and it was into her presence Mr. Seymour was ushered this same evening of December the twenty-fourth.

"Now, don't interrupt!" said Miss Bland hastily, hardly glancing up from the bit of paper on which she was pencilling; "I have purchased nineteen Christmas presents out of £2 10s., and I am trying to find if I have anything left for postage on one yet to be sent."

Mr. Seymour accordingly sat down and studied the even parting of that portion of Miss Bland's head which was presented to him as she returned to her figuring—not the least delightful part of the intercourse with his head book-keeper's daughter being the refreshing and altogether novel fashion in which she ordered him about.

"Poppet and I went Christmas shopping together, with all of our money in one purse," Miss Bland presently deigned to explain—the said Poppet being otherwise known to Miss Bland's friends as her youngest brother Paul—"and after adding three times, I find that I owe Poppet fourpence, which I do not possess to pay him, and must go further in debt for that postage. Where is Poppet, did you ask? He and Tom and Louis have gone to the entertainment St. John's is giving to the choir-boys, and will not get back until after the midnight service, and Elizabeth is finishing off a last bit of Christmas work, and father, having vowed he would give no presents this year, and, as usual, repenting at the last moment, has gone out and is doubtless paying double for everything because it is the eleventh hour."

In his heart, Mr. Seymour blessed the occasion which thus removed the family of Miss Bland, for, there being something of a superfluity of motherless little Blands, it was inconveniently difficult to find opportunities wherein to enjoy this chosen representative of the family apart from the importunities of a Poppet or a Louis or a Tom.

Yet, from the moment when Miss Bland had met him at the door and reported on her father's then somewhat desperate condition, Mr. Herrington Seymour had done little else but seek for just these same rare and coveted opportunities.

"Tom and Louis, being blessed with the gift of saving, have their choir money, you see," continued Miss Bland, "and Elizabeth always reaps a small fortune with her painting at Christmas; but Poppet and I, being the spendthrifts, are always in debt, and

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never have anything unless the others take pity and lend us."

Mr. Seymour, content that she should talk on indefinitely, if only he were privileged to watch the colour coming and going on her smooth cheek, the parting, the curving, the smile, the droop of her lips which changed with every mood, the fluttering of her quick hands, started a little absent-mindedly when he found her pausing and looking towards him expectantly, and made some totally irrelevant remark about the amount of needless trouble and hollow farce attendant on the modern Christmas.

"You know I cannot bear to hear things like that," declared Miss Bland, a rush of colour to her cheeks, a frown between her straight brows. "Christmas is a blessed time, if people would only let it be so, and be influenced by it, and breathe in the good-will and fellowship around them, and——" she checked herself sharply, meeting the amused smile in his eyes at her little outbreak, and sprang up, and, turning her back on him, pretended to be occupied in choosing a sprig from a mass of holly piled on a chair. But, nevertheless, there must have been more than the mere contemplation of the holly on her mind, for, when she did turn, her eyes, which steadily avoided his searching and pursuant gaze, were so bright as to suggest the sparkling therein of unshed tears.

"What?" said he, with just a touch of the masterful in his tones.

"Nothing," came from Miss Bland with more than a touch of defiance in hers.

"But you promised," insisted the other, again a little absently, seeing how fascinating was that tremendous little quiver of her lips, "you promised you would be frank with me always."

Miss Bland assumed an attitude at once resentful and distant, and her accents were iciness itself. "The truth is, I do not see why I ever allow myself to show any feeling even bordering on things deep or real, before you. You never fail to meet it with something cynical, or a smile of amused scepticism, if nothing more, and—and then——"

"And then?" repeated Mr. Seymour, as she stopped, leaning towards her with an aggravating show of breathless interest in his manner.

"Why, then we had better turn to something practical before we fuss," declared Miss Bland, with a crushing change of manner, having finally arranged the holly in a vase to her satisfaction. "So we will go to work and tie and label all my presents for my family and get them disposed of before they return."

"But that is not at all that you promised, or what I came prepared to do," argued Mr. Seymour in tones quite injured and reproachful.

Miss Bland's charming colour deepened and spread down her cheeks, and crept along and under the soft curves of her chin and down her throat. "But I did not promise, you only assumed that I would," she said.

"But if I honestly interpreted it as a promise and hold it as such?" said he, following her to the mantel where she had retreated.

"You had no right to."

"But then, you see, I did. It was perfectly natural I should, I am sure you will allow. I remark that I have had no satisfaction or pleasure out of the so-called festive season of Christmas since I was a small boy. You tell me that with my opportunities I ought to be ashamed to say so. I demand to know my opportunities. You remark on my having fewer friends and fewer relations to tax me than has the average human being at Christmas, and declare that there is a whole cityful of poor who will doubtless go Christmasless, and draw the most alluring pictures of the satisfaction and pleasure of bestowing one's superfluity upon this tasteless populace. And not only converted, but quite fascinated by the alluring way you picture it, and knowing myself to be unable to gracefully descend upon the unexpectant poor alone, I proposed your accompanying me in the *rôle* of the beneficent fairy, or at least to teach me how to impersonate the patron saint properly. And you allow me to go away resting on the assurance that you will, and to come to-night so prepared——"

"I did not promise——"

"But you would have, if Poppet had not come in—and interrupted."

"No, I would not!"

Mr. Seymour sat down with some dejection. "Of course, there is no more to be said then," he remarked, and proceeded to talk about the weather.

Miss Bland looked uneasy. She agreed with him that the weather was all he claimed, ideal, typical, proper for the season, but there was a dissatisfied, half-hearted manner about the way she allowed it, strolling at the same time about the parlour restlessly, and finally, on reaching the door, going out with some sudden abruptness.

Left to himself, Mr. Seymour fell to gazing in the fire, leaning forward, elbow on knee, and, despite the greyness about his temples and the hints about his strong, clean-shaven face that youth had sometime ago departed, there was a depth of feeling in the smile just then about his mouth, a hint of suppression in his manner, that made him seem not so much older than the young girl over whose wilful vagaries he was smiling, as he really was.

When Miss Bland returned, a moment later, she had on jacket, hat and gloves, and her furs—collar and muff—were in her hand. "I went to get ready, you know," she explained.

"Yes," said the other, avoiding comment with the wisdom of experience, and sought his overcoat in the hall.

But she was obviously nervous and embarrassed as they started out. "It seems queer," she began, "and I am afraid audacious for me to have suggested such a thing to you. In—in theory I did mean it, of course, in a joking way, but—but in practice to have actually told you you ought to spend your money——" she stopped, with a tragic little sweep of her hands, and it took him all the rest of the 'bus ride to get her back to anything like her usual self-possessed and bright, unconscious self.

"And even now that we are out," she began again, as they left the 'bus and reached the thronged and gaily lighted pavement, "what are we out to do?"

As the whole affair had sprung from her suggestion, it was more than generous of him not to remind her of that now. "Considering the nature of the expedition," he rejoined promptly, "I should say we had better begin to look for that cityful of poor, and if I were impersonating the beneficent fairy, there is no question I would feel I had a beginning right here before me," and he nodded toward an adjacent recess in an unoccupied doorway of a gaily decorated toy shop.

"It's Joey!" cried Miss Bland, following his glance and halting as she recognised the carrier of coal, the shoveler of snow, the general outdoor help and dependent of her own household.

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The ups and down of childhood, as embodied in the varying lengths of the persons of Joey's small brothers and sisters, turned at this utterance of the eldest Mulligan's name, and broke, as by consent, into a unanimous smile as the bright countenance of Miss Bland was recognised.

"We're buying our Christmas," explained the offspring of the house of Mulligan with one voice, the embarrassed elder brother excepted. "Joey, he tipped us all round, he did," and every little Mulligan forthwith removed a red little fist from a protecting pocket or shawl, and opened it in witness of Joey's generosity.

"Three pennies a-piece, except Lobelia, and hers is a sixpence, cause her jaw is swelled."

Lobelia, of the swollen jaw, as it proved, embarrassed by the possession of her wealth, was still undecided whether to sink her sixpence entire in the purchase of a flannel monkey which walked down a red ladder on its hands, or to divide it, and sink half in a red balloon and the other half in toffee. It was for this decision to be reached before entering the toy-shop that the party had halted and were now standing shifting from foot to foot in the frosty air, and hoarsely breathing out volumes of hoary breath to keep its noses warm.

"I say for the toffee," voted the smallest of the Mulligans.

"Joe Kelly, he's all fer his stomick," retorted Lobelia scornfully; "he's already spent part of his fer nuts, and, anyhow, May ain't settled herself a'tween a box of paints and buns."

May's small voice being lifted in protest that she had long ago decided in favour of the paints, and forthwith calling on little Mike to witness that fact, Joey, with his freckled face a-flame, hoped Miss Bland would understand, "seein' that the children were that excited over Christmas, there wasn't any makin' them behave or mind their manners!"

"And I dare say," began Miss Bland's companion, in an aside apparently meant to be secret and confidential, however audible to the others, "I dare say they would be even more excited if they knew this is not the real Miss Bland at all, but a Beneficent Christmas Fairy——"

The little Mulligans stared.

"——who can change coppers into silver in the twinkling of an eye."

The little Mulligans gasped.

"So that if each of these small people should drop their money into this purse and we then should snap it shut and hand it to her, every single penny will turn to silver in her hands;" and the grave and serious-faced gentleman forthwith solemnly presented an open pocket-book to the gaping and astonished company.

The fist of every little Mulligan closed tight on the instant and sought its pocket, that is, of all but Lobelia, in whom the possession of larger wealth had created a speculative recklessness that led her to drop her all into the open purse.

Yet no sooner had the pocket-book changed hands and, true to the serious-faced gentleman's prophecy, Lobelia's sixpence had emerged swollen into five times its former size and value, than every penny in the crowd rained into this Fortunatus, while even Joey stared, open-mouthed.

And when, under the supervision of the Beneficent Fairy, the family of Mulligans had ended its Christmas shopping, it fairly staggered under its accumulated load, while from the basket, forming speechless Joey's portion, there peeped forth purchases such as promised to stock the Mulligan larder with a profusion hitherto unknown.

Then, when the little Mulligans were hoisted into a passing tram and sent rejoicing on their way, the Beneficent Christmas Fairy turned to her escort with a rapturous little catch in her voice: "It—it was lovely." she said, "but—but it was all you; I never could have done it in that lovely way—never!"

"No?" returned the other, with all the accustomed scepticism; then, with another note, and that of deep tenderness, somewhere mixed in it, "but your turn to be generous will come later."

Whereat, either because of the tone or the emphasis, which seemed to convey something subtle and hidden in the meaning, the Beneficent Fairy froze instantly, and haughtily commanded that the passing crowds be scanned for further subjects for munificence.

Nor was there pressing need for a microscopic study of the throng that tramped the streets and jostled and pushed their way along the noisy, busy thoroughfares. The Beneficent Fairy and her escort had purposely avoided the highway and sought the side streets, where shops and pavements were the more likely to be patronised by the class they had in mind. And even at the first fruit stall of one such street they turned into, an opportunity awaited in the person of a small representative of the Christmasless poor, clothed in an out-at-elbows, dingy dress and much wistfulness, and eyeing with unexpected eagerness the pyramids of Christmas fruits and wares piled up before her.

"Mary Jane!" The swarthy woman, turning back, impatient at her delay, called her. Mary Jane of the wistful countenance moved not, but stood and watched the crowning pyramidal glories vanish into a gigantic paper bag, and gazed from them to the tall gentleman and the pretty lady, all smiles, and brightness and furs and warmth and comfort, by his side, who were pointing out a wealth of nuts and dates and figs to follow oranges, bananas, apples, into that yawning cavity. And when, with a merry word from the pretty lady, Mary Jane found in her arms that weight of tropical richness, she, lacking that grace of manner belonging to the Mary Janes of the upper world, only gasped, but it was noticed that in the eyes of the swarthy woman was swimming something shining and wet, as she took Mary Jane quite gently by the hand and walked away.

Then in at the fair strolled the Beneficent Christmas Fairy and her Bearer of the Purse, into that vast heterogeneous collections of second and third rate wares, where, for a third more than its honest value, one can purchase anything.

And here, amid the Christmas wares and decorations the Beneficent Fairy found herself quite in her element, and, aided and abetted by the ever-watchful Bearer of the Purse, found herself introducing red-cheeked dolls into empty, wistful childish arms, and slipping knives with a reckless multiplicity of blades into small boys' grimy, yet to the last, sceptical fingers, and carrying a pale-faced, hungry brood from under its paler-faced mother's wing and seating them in the lunch-room, and feasting them to their hungry little stomachs' full content. During which occupation on the Beneficent Fairy's part, the Bearer of the Purse stole the pale-faced mother's basket from her arm, and leaving her to be coaxed by the Fairy's wiles into the taking of a cup of coffee, swelled its pitiful pennies' worth of groceries into pounds, its feeble promise of Christmas cheer into a

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heavy reality of plenty. Then the Bearer of the Purse stealing away, with the Beneficent Fairy clinging to his arm with an unconscious confidence that thrilled him, they left the brood choking over its pie, the mother over her tears, and brought up behind a much be-whiskered old man in fur cap and mittens, who could not withhold his perplexed confidences five seconds before the tender smiling ingratiating advances of the Beneficent Fairy.

"It was the children, to be sure, Lisa's, his only daughter's children; he was out buying Christmas gifts for Lisa and Katie and Carl, and the baby, William Joseph, named after himself. Here was the little red waggon for Carl, and the lunch basket for Katie, and the doll for Little Lisa, but at William Joseph he hesitated perplexed. It must be more than this small rattle for William Joseph, named after himself; and then too, Lisa—Lisa was a good daughter, and it was on his mind to choose a present for Lisa, too."

And when the Beneficent Fairy had suggested a warm and tasteful and not over dear white woolly cap for William Joseph, and a pretty glass preserve dish for Lisa, and had slipped a fascinating woolly sheep that said "Ba-a," into his hand, and begged he would take that also to William Joseph, she and the Bearer of the Purse departed, and the dear old man was left beaming, still hunting for the words to best tell what his feelings were.

And, because it was just round the corner from the Fair, the two went through the market house, gay with cedar and tissue paper garlands, and stopped by a stall and managed to hear the most of a little old woman's perturbed confidences to the pork gentleman.

How she had started out to buy a few sausages for her old man's Christmas breakfast, as well as a bit of something at Miss Farmer's request, for Miss Farmer's crippled Jamie's Christmas dinner, Miss Farmer being the lady who rented the top back room, next to her own, and buttonho'ed for the shops for a living, and not able, at all, to be after losing even the bit of change, which, along with her own, it seemed, had just been taken from the little old woman's pocket.

And when, at the instigation of the Bearer of the Purse, the Beneficent Fairy had whispered some words of comfort under the rusty old bonnet, and had pressed more than the price of several breakfasts of pork sausages into the numb and ungloved old hand, both the little old women and the Beneficent Fairy were trying to smile at each other through their tears, while the Bearer of the Purse and the Pork Gentleman made up a basket for crippled Jamie's Christmas dinner, to which the Beef Gentleman in the next stall and the Vegetable Lady, and even the Fish, Game and Poultry Gentleman, overhearing the story, contributed.

And when they left the brightly-lighted shops and turned into the less frequented side-streets, the love in his nature overcame his discretion, and, bending down, he kissed her cheeks. Burning with wrath and scorn and defiance, she walked on and left him to follow, until, overtaking her where the street grew dark and silent and altogether deserted, he found she was crying again, and caught her by the hand, and she broke down altogether and confessed she loved him dearly, truly, had loved him always, and that the fault, the blame, was all his, for not having made her say so before!

And in time, with never a thought from either to take a tram now, the two reached the square shadowed by the towers and steeple of St. John's and—through the swirling snow, now coming down thick and fast—called to the head book-keeper, also bound for the midnight service at St. John's.

And the head book-keeper, peering in his near-sighted way several moments before he recognised them, let Kate take his hand and hang to his arm and make him confess, like the guileless gentleman that he was, that he had paid two and even three times too much for everything, even according to her prophecy.

Nor dreamed the dear, unworldly, short-sighted soul that Kate's companion had never loosed his hold of her hand on the other side, nor yet that that gentleman, drawing her to him as the head book-keeper went into the vestibule, had kissed her then and there in the deserted porchway of St. John's.

All of which blindness to his own interest—seeing that to him the worldly gain would be nothing to the losing of his Kate's companionship and tender ministrations and admonishments—possibly explains why this gentleman had and probably would stop at being a head book-keeper—for ever.

And, within the church, as suddenly the midnight gloom and silence burst into light and music and rejoicing, the voice of Poppet—Poppet, the torment, the tease, the darling of the head book-keeper's household; the pride, the joy, the glory of St. John's choir—the voice of Poppet rose high above the swelling organ tones, and soared and thrilled even to the deepest depths the hearts of the congregation.

"For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. Fall on your knees! O hear the angels' voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born! Fall on your knees! O hear the angels' voices! O night divine! O night when Christ was born! O night divine, O night divine!"

And kneeling by her, her hand behind the sheltering pew clasped in his, one of that congregation whispered after Poppet, deeply, reverently, to the woman by his side:

"O night, O night divine!"

GEO. MADDEN MARTEN.

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The Queen Against Owen

By Allen Upward

Author of "Secrets of the Courts of Europe," "The Prince of Balkistan," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

Eleanor Margaret Owen is charged with the murder of her benefactress, Ann Lewis. Charles Prescott, who has known Eleanor since a child, holds the brief for the prosecution. His friend, George Tressamer, is in love with Eleanor, and holds the brief for her defence. The prosecution is vigorously pressed by Mr. Lewis, deceased's nephew. The case comes on at the Mynyddshire Assizes.

CHAPTER V.

The Case for the Crown.

"May it please your Lordship,

"Gentlemen of the jury, I am merely repeating a commonplace when I say that I rise to address you under a very heavy sense of responsibility. As you have heard, the prisoner at the bar is charged with the crime of wilful murder. It is now my duty, acting on behalf of the Crown, to tell you how that crime was committed, according to the view which I have to ask you to take; and to bring before you the witnesses whose evidence, if you believe it, goes to establish the guilt of the accused."

Thus Mr. Prescott. It was the third day of the assizes. On the Tuesday afternoon, after a true bill had been found, Mr. Justice Buller had announced that he should set apart this day for the trial of the great case. The court had opened at ten o'clock. It was crammed to suffocation. The intensest excitement, whetted by the interval of delay, reigned supreme. All eyes were strained towards the dock as the words were uttered:

"Put up Eleanor Margaret Owen."

Another moment and she stood before them. Clothed in black from head to foot, pale as a lily, and trembling in every limb, she sank upon the chair behind her, and covered her face with her hands.

A great throb of sympathy shook the court. Sobs were heard. The most prejudiced of those who had bandied her name about for the past few weeks felt a dim sense of shame. Only a few out of all those present were unmoved: the judge, schooled to conceal all trace of emotion, nay, schooled to stifle it as it rose; the jury, too overcome by the duty thrust upon them to be just then alive to what was happening; the counsel on both sides, who, for different reasons, forbore as long as they could from looking at the dock.

She was beautiful. All the suffering she had gone through had not been able to affect that, unless to render her beauty more spiritual and delicate. Her hair of that light glistening brown which is best known as golden; her drooping eyes of deepest blue; her wide, square forehead, unshaded by that device of ugliness, the artificial fringe of hair; the full, open lips; the rounded chin—every mark of a certain order of loveliness was there.

And she wore no veil. Some of the women present condemned her for that. The matron of the prison had besought her to use one. Her answer was decisive. She had never put a veil on since childhood, and she would not wear one now. She would not shrink beneath a false charge. She would show her face to them all.

She spoke bravely; but she had not realised all that was before her. And when she came up the dark, winding stairs from the underground cells, and found herself in that—Great God! Was it some crowded theatre, or a solemn court of justice?—her physical strength gave way, and she scarce knew what happened for some moments.

Then her will asserted itself again. She stood up. She faced the judge, the jury, the crowded bar, the fashionable dames in the gallery, and showed no more signs of fear. Her name was called, the hideous accusation was made. She answered it out loud. Her counsel, dreading another scene like that already recorded, had bent across the table

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and warned the clerk of arraigns beforehand of what the plea would be. The jury was sworn, including in their number the two onlookers whose remarks on the previous day had been so suddenly cut short. The last formula had been recited by the clerk.

"Gentlemen of the jury, the prisoner at the bar stands indicted for that she did wilfully murder one Ann Elizabeth Lewis. To that she has pleaded that she is not guilty. Now, you are to try the issue, and to say whether she is guilty or not."

And now the counsel for the prosecution had begun his speech.

"Two years ago the prisoner was left an orphan by the death of her father, the Rector of Porthstone. She went to live in the house of a lady who had known her from a child, and who lived in the same place. With that lady she remained down to the 1st of last June, and it is that lady with whose murder she now stands charged.

"Miss Lewis, the deceased, may be described as eccentric. She was in the habit for some years before her death of making very large purchases of jewels——"

"I beg your pardon." It was the counsel for the prisoner who rose to his feet and interrupted. "My lord, I am sorry to interrupt my learned friend at this early stage, but may I ask him if he has any evidence that the prisoner knew of the existence of these jewels? If not, my lord, I submit he is not entitled to refer to them at all."

The Judge: "What do you say, Mr. Prescott?"

"My lord, I am entirely in your lordship's hands. This is the first time it has been suggested to me that the fact of the deceased's having this jewellery was not a matter of common knowledge in the household. I, therefore, can't say at this stage whether I shall be able to distinctly fix the prisoner with such knowledge."

The Judge: "Of course, you mean to bring this in as motive?"

She stood up.

Mr. Prescott: "Yes, my lord."

The Judge: "It is a very important matter. If the jury were satisfied that the prisoner did not know of these purchases, and if there were no other motive suggested, it might have a very great effect on their minds." (At this point the jury tried to look as if something were having a great effect on their minds, and did not altogether succeed.) "Perhaps you had better not say anything about the jewels now. You will have another opportunity after you see what your evidence is."

Mr. Prescott: "If your lordship pleases. Well, then, gentlemen, I will come at once to the night when this crime was committed."

Here Mr. Pollard was observed to write something on a slip of paper and hand it to his leader. Mr. Prescott stopped to glance at it, and then went on:

"I may, however, mention one thing before leaving the question of motive, and it is this. I shall be able to prove to you that the deceased on one occasion, in the presence of a witness, made some promise or offer to the prisoner as to remembering her in her will. It is, of course, for you to say what weight you will attach to that circumstance."

Here the jury tried to look as if they knew what weight to attach to it, and again utterly failed.

"On the first of June, a nephew of Miss Lewis's, and her only surviving relative, as I am instructed, and who will be called before you, arrived at Porthstone. He had just returned from Australia, and went to see his relative. He dined there, and spent the evening. At 10 o'clock he came away to his hotel and at once retired to bed.

"The deceased lady had also retired to her room, and from the evidence there can be no doubt that she undressed and got into bed. She was last seen alive a few minutes after ten. The murder was discovered the next morning at nine. Between those hours the crime must have been committed.

"The female servants followed their mistress. At half-past ten the butler fastened the front door. He will describe the fastenings to you, and he will also tell you of a peculiarity in the latch, about which I shall have something to say presently."

The counsel then went on to detail the events narrated in his brief, only throwing in an observation now and then as he went along. When he had described the evidence of the removal of the body by the window he said:

"And now we come to one of the difficulties in the case. If the prisoner lowered the body out of the window in the first instance, why did she afterwards return to the house, and take a second journey, carrying a burden of some kind? I am hardly at liberty, after what has fallen from his lordship, to suggest to you that this second exit was in order to remove something which the murderer wanted to steal, something with the object of stealing which she committed the graver crime. But, gentlemen, there is another explanation, a terrible way of accounting for that second journey, so terrible and horrible that I wish it were not my bounden duty to put it before you. And it is this:

"Only a portion of the victim's body has been recovered. That portion is a hand. Now, in the absence of anything to make us think that the cutting off of the hand was a solitary mutilation, we are forced to the probable conclusion that whoever killed this poor woman mutilated her in a very dreadful manner. It is possible, therefore, that after lowering one portion of her victim's remains through the bedroom window, she returned upstairs to bring down some other part or parts of the body."

As the counsel with evident reluctance brought out these horrible points, a shudder ran through the court. The prisoner had borne it all with tolerable firmness up to now, but she was completely overcome by this part of the speech, and cowered down into her chair, again concealing her emotions by putting her hands before her face.

If Mr. Prescott had any idea of making the jury revolt at

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the thought of associating such shocking brutalities with the prisoner, his speech produced the very opposite effect to what he intended. The jury saw in it nothing but the natural reluctance of a man at making such a charge, overborne by the counsel's conviction of the prisoner's guilt. Their faces assumed an aspect of stony horror as they turned their eyes upon the shrinking girl. A slight frown crossed Tressamer's countenance, followed by a look of contempt.

"The second difficulty in the case," resumed Prescott, "is as to the latchkey. As I have explained, there were only three keys in existence, so far as the prosecution have been able to discover. These will all be produced before you. One was found in the pocket of the deceased's dress, the other was never out of the possession of the witness, Simons, the third was on the prisoner's person when she was arrested. One of these keys, therefore, must have been used in the latch that night, and must have been used with such carelessness or ignorance—it is for you to say which"—again the jury tried to look as if they were prepared to say which, and again they broke down—"that the latch was raised too high, and stuck. Now, here I must draw your attention to a very important circumstance. The person who entered the house last, whether the prisoner or anyone else, and who fastened up the front-door as it was found by the witness, Lucy Jones, the following morning, that person must, for some reason or other, have failed to notice the condition of the latch. She, if we assume it was the prisoner, must be supposed to have been so agitated from some cause that she failed to notice what she was doing when she raised the latch with her key, and failed again to notice how the latch was caught when she proceeded to fasten the door inside.

"Gentlemen, it is for you to ask yourselves whether a reasonable explanation, an explanation that will justify you in coming to an adverse verdict in this case, is furnished by the suggestion that the prisoner's mind was excited by the crime she had just committed to such an extent as to deprive her of the power of observing these things."

At this point Mr. F. J. Pollard began to be aware that his leader was not pressing the case very vigorously. He looked round at his brother in the solicitors' seat behind. That gentleman looked extremely angry. He had noticed something curious in his counsel's manner from the first. He now leant over and whispered to his brother:

"What's the matter with Prescott? I can't make him out. He talks as if he were the judge summing up, instead of the counsel for the prosecution."

Mr. Pollard, the barrister, shrugged his shoulders and bit his lip. He could do nothing. It was not for him to offer advice to his leader. A man of Mr. Prescott's standing was not likely to tolerate any interference from a young fellow just called.

But the offended proceeded to cap his misdeeds by a new suggestion, which had never occurred to either of the Pollards. It had been noted down long ago by Tressamer, though.

"The third difficulty in this case, gentlemen, is one which has doubtless been present to your minds all the time I have been speaking."

This time the jury made a desperate effort to conceal their astonishment, and to look as if they perfectly well knew what was coming. But no one was deceived.

"I refer to the disposal of the body. On this point we have exactly two pieces of evidence. A young woman like the prisoner was seen walking in the direction of Newton Bay, about midnight, by the witness, Evan Thomas. On the following afternoon the severed hand was discovered on the beach of Newton Bay by a visitor.

"How did it get there? It is for you to say. On behalf of the Crown, it is my duty to suggest to you that the prisoner in the dock may have carried the result of her crime to that distant spot, in several journeys, on one of which she happened to be seen. I must put it to you that piece by piece she accomplished her revolting task, and that she sought to hide the traces of her guilt in the sea. If you think that a rational and likely course of circumstances, no doubt you will say so.

"Gentlemen, I have done. I trust I have not detained you at undue length over this case, which must strike you as one of the most grave and difficult that could well come before a court of justice. I shall now, with the assistance of my learned friend, put the evidence before you. If you are left in any doubt after hearing it, and, after hearing the prisoner's defence, if you feel that there are mysteries in the case which have not been properly explained, and difficulties which have not been fully met, then you will, I feel sure, be only too glad to acquit the prisoner of this dreadful charge. But, if, on the other hand, you are fully and entirely satisfied, if you feel no doubt whatever—of course, I mean no reasonable doubt—you will, I am equally sure, do your painful duty by returning a verdict of guilty."

The barrister sat down, and his junior, who had listened impatiently to the close of the speech, at once started up, and called out:

"John Lewis!"

And now, for the first time, Charles Prescott ventured to look towards the dock. After the first involuntary glance at Eleanor's entrance, he had steadily kept his eyes averted. During the whole of his address, which took up nearly an hour, he never once looked round. He was afraid to trust himself. That one brief glance had revived the memories of old with an added force which almost overwhelmed him.

Yet he was not what would be called an emotional man. His was one of those natures which maintain a seeming coldness under all circumstances, but which often conceal in their depths a strength of passion and devotion compared to which the fiery outbreaks of others are mere "sound and fury, signifying nothing." And now this hidden force was stirred. It held him in its grasp, and his whole being shook and quivered to its centre.

Not love at first sight, for he had seen her before. Yet love, awakening suddenly as he looked upon her in the full bloom of opening womanhood, surrounded by a halo of suffering, and peril, and mystery, the fated victim of an accusation which he would not believe and could not disprove. This it was that overpowered him; this it was that led to that feeble, halting advocacy which surprised all who heard it. They could not recognise the keen, trenchant Prescott, who had made such a name for himself on the circuit. The Pollards were the only ones there who resented it, but they were by no means the only ones to be puzzled at the change.

But Prescott did not easily give way to his feelings. The sense of duty was sufficiently strong in him to keep him from absolute abandonment of his cause. He had gone faithfully through the case, and he was now preparing to take his part in examining the witnesses. Pride and professional training asserted themselves, and he stood firm.

At this moment, however, and when he was suffering most acutely, one of those happy accidents which men call good fortune or Providence, according to their dispositions, came to his aid. A solicitor's clerk came hurriedly into the court and made his way to the barrister's side. An unforeseen event had occurred. A case in the other court which had been expected to last all day had suddenly come to a settlement by agreement between the parties. The next case on the list was one in which Mr. Prescott was engaged, and engaged by himself, and his immediate presence was called for. Breathing an ejaculation of thankfulness, he got up and quickly withdrew, leaving young Pollard to manage the witnesses as best he could.

The judge looked annoyed, and the solicitor, Pollard, somewhat dismayed at this sudden disappearance of the leader for the Crown. But young Pollard himself was only too pleased. At last he was to have his chance. He was

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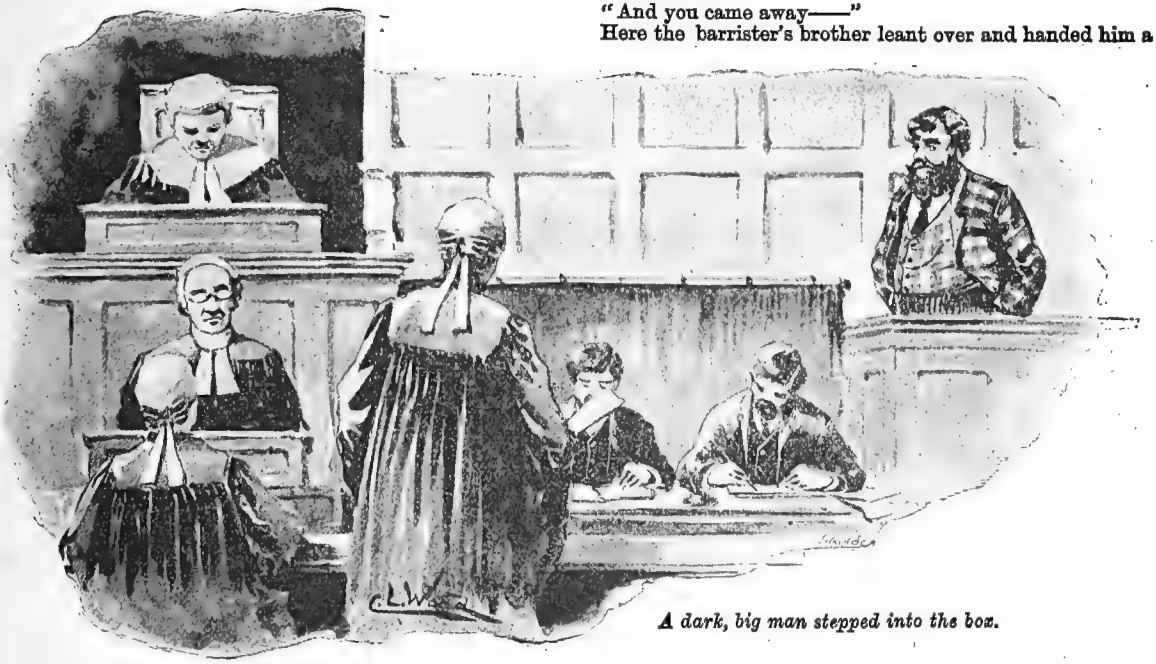
eft captain of the ship. If all went well he might hope to get through the evidence and have the concluding speech in Prescott's absence. And his satisfaction was shared by Tressamer. Tressamer knew his man. For the first time that morning a look of satisfaction crossed his face, and he settled his wig firmly on his head as he prepared to encounter the moving spirit of the prosecution.

And Eleanor? She did not altogether understand what had happened. But she saw that the man who had put the case against her so mildly had now gone out of it altogether, and her heart gave a great beat of joy for the first time since she had parted with George Tressamer, two days before the memorable 1st of June.



A dark, big man stepped into the box.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WITNESSES.

"JOHN LEWIS!"

A dark, big man stepped into the box, frowning heavily around him. The oath was administered, and then Mr. Pollard commenced in the approved style.

"Your name is John Lewis, and you are now living at 'The Shrubbery,' Porthstone?"

"Yes."

"That's where the murder was committed?" interrupted the judge.

"Yes, my lord. The witness inherited it under Miss Lewis's will."

The Judge: "Have you lived there ever since?"

Witness: "Yes, my lord."

The Judge (after a pause, during which Mr. Pollard waits impatiently): "Go on, Mr. Pollard. What are you keeping us for?"

Mr. Pollard: "I beg your lordship's pardon." To witness: "You are the nephew of the deceased, and have just returned from Australia?"

"Yes; I came back to my aunt."

"After making some money out there, I believe?"

"I object!"

This interruption, it need not be said, came from Tressamer. He had risen to his feet, and put on that scowl of scornful indignation with which an experienced counsel knows how to daunt a young beginner and make him feel he has committed himself.

"My lord, my friend cannot prove that, and if he could, it cannot possibly be evidence against the prisoner. It is a most improper question."

The judge looked a little puzzled.

"It is irrelevant," he said, "and I won't allow it if you object. In a case like this we can't be too strict, of course."

Mr. Pollard began to realise that greatness has its snares as well as its triumphs. He tried to get back on to the track.

"You went to see the deceased on the first of June?"

"I did."

"And you came away——"

Here the barrister's brother leant over and handed him a slip of paper. He took it and read it, turned red, and, trying to appear as if he had not been prompted, put the question contained in the slip of paper:

"Was anything said about the jewels?"

The judge stared. Tressamer started to his feet in a transport of fury.

"My lord, my friend is deliberately leading the witness. In a case of murder it is disgraceful!"

"I agree with you, Mr. Tressamer. Don't answer that question, sir."

Thus the judge. Poor young Pollard turned as red as the judge's robe, and stammered out some apology. His brother mentally swore at him, and every solicitor in court resolved never to give him another brief.

"Go on, Mr. Pollard; you mustn't keep us waiting."

The wretched young man gave a last look at his brief, and closed the examination.

"And you left about ten o'clock?"

("Leading again!" ejaculated his opponent.)

"Yes. My lord, may I say——"

"No!" snapped the judge. "Say nothing unless you're asked."

The witness looked angry, and frowned savagely at his counsel. But the latter had now sat down, and the cross-examination was about to begin.

Tressamer had been studying the witness, with a view of ascertaining his weak point. This was evidently his temper.

Accordingly, he avoided irritating him till he had obtained as much as he could from him. He began:

"Had you any other relatives living besides Miss Lewis?"

The witness was thoroughly thrown out. He could not see what was coming. In a sullen voice he responded:

"Yes, I've a sister in the North."

"Did you go to see her before your aunt?"

"No. My lord, may I explain?"

The Judge: "You had better confine yourself to the questions now; you will have an opportunity of explaining afterwards."

"You went straight to your aunt. Was she pleased to see you?"

"Yes, she seemed very pleased."

"And yet she let you stay at a hotel?"

"That was only for the first night. It was arranged that I was to occupy a bedroom in her house afterwards."

"Oh!"

Type cannot do justice to the peculiar intonation with which the barrister uttered this exclamation. The whole court was aroused to suspect something beneath the surface. Then he turned round to the jury with a mysterious expression, and slowly repeated the answer:

"It was arranged that you were to occupy a room in her house after that night?"

The jury roused themselves for a grand effort, and succeeded in imparting a distinct air of suspicion to their countenances.

At last Mr. Lewis's temper came into play. He cried out:

"Yes; and if I had been there on the first night I might have prevented this murder."

"Silence, sir!" said the judge.

And now Tressamer brought out the question for which he had been preparing the way all along:

"When this arrangement was made about your living in the house, did your aunt (remember you are on your oath, sir!)—*did she happen—to—furnish—you—with—a* LATCHKEY?"

The effect was electrical. He had brought out the last words of the question slowly, one by one, and then he suddenly hurled the final word at the witness like a weapon.

John Lewis instantly realised the situation. The question was tantamount to an accusation. The whole court took it in that sense, and gazed at him in deadly earnestness. He turned livid. For a moment he could hardly bring his lips to frame a syllable. At length he recovered his self-command, and thundered out:

"No, sir. May H aven strike me dead if she did!"

The fierce earnestness of his denial produced a revulsion of feeling in the court. The jury felt that the counsel had been guilty of unfairness in making such a charge so suddenly, and, as it seemed, with such absence of grounds.

The judge was annoyed, too. Sir Daniel Buller hated sensationalism. In fact, he did not like anything which threw his own dignity into the shade. He liked to feel that he was in the star part, and that everybody else in court was merely playing up to his grand effects. He, therefore, refrained from rebuking the witness, and from this stage he showed himself less favourable to the counsel for the defence.

But Tressamer had anticipated something of this sort, and he had a card in reserve. He went on with his cross-examination as if nothing had happened.

"You gave the prisoner into custody, I think?"

"I did."

"You made up your mind that she was guilty, I suppose, without much thinking?"

"I thought there was absolute proof of it."

"That's what I mean. You were anxious that she should be convicted, were you not?"

"I was anxious that she should be tried. I thought it my duty to see that this crime was punished."

"By the conviction of the prisoner?"

"If she were guilty."

"But you felt sure she was guilty? You were the one to accuse her, you know."

Mr. Lewis was getting irritated again. He made no answer to this suggestion, and the barrister forbore to press it, contenting himself with a meaning glance at the jury.

"You were represented at the inquest, were you not, by Messrs. Pollard?"

"Yes."

"The gentlemen who are now conducting this prosecution—nominally—on behalf of the Crown?"

And with this parting shot he resumed his seat.

Young Pollard instantly rose.

"My lord, the witness was anxious to explain one of his answers to my learned friend. Would your lordship allow him to do so now?"

"Yes, yes," was his lordship's answer.

The witness instantly took advantage of the permission.

"I wished to say, my lord, that the reason why I went first to see my aunt, instead of going to my sister's, was because she had befriended me when I was young. She furnished the money to start me with in Australia, and I felt it only right, in common gratitude, to come straight and thank her on my return."

Another revulsion of feeling swept over the court. The effect of Tressamer's last suggestion was obliterated. Lewis was once more in favour.

Pollard had scored. His brother twitched him by the gown from behind as a hint to sit down. But the unfortunate young man must needs try and improve on his lucky shot. He summoned up a very tragic demeanour, and put the fatal question:

"And is there the smallest ground for suggesting that you were near the house or out of your hotel after ten that night?"

The witness showed confusion. Instead of answering in the prompt, decided style he had hitherto shown, he hesitated for some seconds, and then said with visible embarrassment:

"No, there is none."

Pollard hastily sat down. The rules which govern the production of evidence did not permit Tressamer to put a further question to the witness, but he was skilful enough to do what accomplished the same result. He called across the barristers' table, in a perfectly audible voice:

"Is anyone from the hotel here, Mr. Pollard?"

"Not that I know of," was the sullen answer.

And now it was the judge's turn, and he proceeded to put to the witness that question which was in the mind of every person in court, but which neither of the counsel had dared to put, each fearing the answer might be unfavourable to himself.

"Tell me, Mr. Lewis, had you any special reason—don't tell me what your reasons were—but had you any reason, apart from what you were told by others, for accusing the prisoner of this murder?"

"I had, my lord."

"Did that reason arise in your mind as a consequence of anything which you saw the prisoner do, or which took place in her presence?"

"Not exactly, my lord. My aunt said to me—— "

The judge swiftly raised his hand with a forbidding gesture, and pursed up his lips.

"That will do. You can go."

Mr. Lewis retired, and the jury were left to wonder what the mysterious reason could be, the result on most of their minds being far more unfavourable to the prisoner than if the rules of evidence had allowed the witness to speak freely.

(To be continued.)

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OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By **Geo. C. Wallis**, Author of *The Winning of Gunhild*, etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Days of Desolation.

I never thought to see the light again when the waters closed over me as the helpless vessel clove them in her headlong fall, but she was a good ship, soundly built, and ballasted with loving care, and ere my breath was altogether gone, she bore up to the surface with a buoyant spring, shook the water from her deck with deep disdain, and righting, lay tossing heavily on the slowly subsiding waves.

One half of her crew was gone, but Valdo and Atris were left me, together with Orlanis, and it was not long before we got the oars out and to work, gained the broken quay, made the *Ravager* fast thereto, and set foot on the shore.

The terror-maddened thousands who had sought refuge by the sea had now fled back into the streets and houses of the ruined, grey-clad city, and were wandering aimlessly about the pavements, or crouching in deadly fear in holes and corners of the mighty buildings which still raised some framework to the smiling sky.

Drawing our swords—for we knew that the lawless and the robbers would now be reaping their grim harvest—my three officers and I, leaving the sailors to guard the vessel, set our faces towards the crumbled ruin that had once been the palace, anxiety for my loved ones quickening my steps and burning into my brain as I went, till I scarce knew how I got along over the damp, muddy, crowded, wreck-strewn streets.

The faithful three kept at my heels, however, Atris and Orlanis silent, and Valdo grumbling at my carelessness, till, through the maze of ruin, we came to the palace.

The great sea-wave had not reached so far as that by nearly a stone's cast, and so, when with the help of a score of willing hands gathered on the spot, the fallen stones were dragged away from the underground entrance, the white, scared prisoners came forth unharmed, but almost speechless with terror.

The ladies and their maids for the most part fainted or burst into tears of joy; but Briseis, though her cheeks had a death-like pallor, came and put her hand in mine without a word of her own distress, while Didron and Vesta, child-like, seized my tunic and essayed to pull me two ways at once, till I was fain to pick them up and bear them on my shoulders, laughing at their prattle the while, though there was no laughter in my heart.

Said Briseis, when I told her how the great fleet was destroyed, and how the *Ravager* alone was saved to us:

"Whither go ye now, husband, to house ourselves, our children, and our friends? There is no large house left standing, and the people seem gone mad with fear."

"'Tis a hard question, dear one," I said. "I would have taken you aboard the ship, but that the craft is helmless and battered, and needs weeks of repair before she will be seaworthy. It may be best to take the cariole and seek shelter inland. Perchance the ruin has not gone far."

"The horses are dead in their stables, King," said an attendant who overheard my speech, "and the royal carriages are crushed under the ruins of their shelter! Also, the streets are impassable, save by men on foot."

"May a thousand curses rest on these doings!" I cried in desperation; "would the gods have us to live homeless like the beasts of the field?"

"If it seemeth well to you, King," said Penares, a young officer in the Royal Guard, "I would advise that you make

yonder tower your palace till order is restored," and he pointed with his spear towards the mighty monumental column on the outskirts of the city.

It had withstood the great convulsion's fiercest shock, and now loomed grey and grim above the scene of universal desolation, seeming all the greater now that the highest edifices of the city were humbled to heaps of shapeless wreck.

"Well thought and said, Penares," I answered. "Thither we will go, and that as soon as may be, for *there* are stores of food, and it is now past noon. You, Penares, with these fifty of the Guards, shall protect us on our way. As to our ladies, we who are strong must carry them this tiresome journey."

"An we be not too heavy," said Briseis, smiling, as I set down the children, and picked her up in my arms.

"Some burdens are so precious that the bearer feels no weight," I replied, as I bore my sweet load on. Behind came Valdo, bearing Didron, and Atris with Vesta on his shoulder, and several nobles and soldiers carrying their wives or love-maids or their little ones, while in front and in the rear, the guard marched with levelled spears and drawn swords.

We made but slow progress through the choked streets, and awful and sad were the sights that met our gaze as we wended painfully on.

Families, or sole survivors of families, sat or wandered disconsolate about the ruins of their houses; priests kept watch with keen daggers over the buried treasure of their fallen temples; soldiers stood on sentry at their appointed places, heedless of what had happened around; and hundreds of homeless, friendless outcasts, listlessly or with terror-haunted looks, ran stumbling hither, thither, everywhither, as though seeking what they had lost, throughout the great city.

Bands of armed robbers, and strong ruffians single-handed, prowled about the streets in all directions, taking tribute of all and sundry whom they could overpower. It was the harvest of the murderer and the thief, and right well did they labour at the task of reaping the fruits thereof! No person, no place, was sacred to the violaters, and but that they stood in awe of the Royal Guard, the King himself would have had no respect from them.

And in the midst of the sights and sounds of disaster and violence we heard the mocking refrain of ribald songs, and saw Wantonness stalking abroad with unblushing face.

So we hurried on past crumbling houses, broken columns, shattered arches, splintered marble glaring white and cold amid the grosser wreck, temples richly carved and painted fallen to the dust, stone walls thrown flat upon the ground, great drifts of ash piled up in heaps by fierce wind-eddies, and human beings dead and dying, or outcast, homeless, friendless by the hundred-score; past all these evidences of the dreadful night, till we came to where the ways were fairly passable by gentle feet, and there our fair ones bade us set them down to walk, so that our arms might gain a rest, and, little loth, we did so, for, despite our protestations, a burning ache began to seize our shoulder-joints, and our strides grew short and shaky.

Here, in the city's outskirts, the damage was not so great, save for the thronging crowds through which we slowly made our way.

"Come, let us hasten!" I said to Briseis, seizing her roughly by the arm; "these are not sounds fit for the ears of a fair queen. Let us not linger! As for these besotted wretches, who make merry in the day of a city's death and have no better use to which to put the gain they have taken from the common folk, Penares shall do with them as he will!"

I was about to give command in my anger that the revellers and all such be slain in their cups, and their houses pulled about their ears, when from a street on the left came melody of another kind, strong and clear in the noisy air, at which the crowd hushed, and all men stopped and turned to look and listen. Clear and strong in the air resounded the loud, full tones from a hundred throats:

Cease your revels; death is nigh!
Cast your pallid looks on high.
Ask not wherefore, ask not why,
But nerve yourselves to die—to die!

Pray the gods to close your eyes,
All ye people who are wise:
Wisdom only, courage brings,
That scorns at weak and foolish things.

The dizzy summit of the column.

Nearer came the song and the singers, nearer and nearer, till we saw the people give back as for a royal progress, and down the widening space between the throngs came a company of a hundred priests, proceeding from the direction of the half-ruined Temple of the Three Spirits; Unim, the Priest of Truth, Kalen, the Priest of Love, and Neolyn, the Priest of Life, walking in the van, and every priest in the stern-faced company wearing his robes of office, and scattering handfuls of the Passport Pieces as they passed along with slow and measured tread. The song went on, sounding strangely solemn in the midst of the sudden calm:

Cease your weepings, cease your wails;
Hide the soft cheek when it pales;
Cease not praying, though it stales—
Death comes to all and never fails!

Count your days and count your years;
Mind the blood-tie that endears
Heart to heart and soul to soul—
Short is all life, and Death its goal!

The little band of stern-faced men, moving thus unarmed through a crowd of outcasts half maddened by loss and fear, slowly passed the place where I stood with Briseis clinging to me, and the fifty soldiers of the guard, with a score of other loyal subjects ringed around us, and not even for the royal presence, which priests are so ready to acknowledge,

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did they pause or cease their awful chant, but went on as though I had never been:

Throng the temples, 'plore the Three—
Rulers of the land and sea—
To make the seeming bitter, sweet;
To smooth the path for flying feet.

Ask that he—dread Amaranth—
God of Death—in this ill month
Will veil his face in shades of night,
And make your heavy burden light.

They passed, and the song grew fainter, and they marched along and were lost to view, but still we listened and clearly heard another strain of the priestly warning:

Cease your revels, night is nigh!
Cease your tears, cease now to sigh!
Cease not praying, ye who fear!
Hope is yonder: Death is here!

Now all thought of punishing the tipsy revellers, whose levity had roused my ire, vanished, and I gave no command, even when one of the gay young nobles, with a leman on his arm, and a great amphora spilling hillside wine as he came, in his hand, staggered to the door of his mansion, and after drinking deeply, blasphemed the priests, the gods, and the people, for disturbing his pleasure.

I had stopped to reflect, and Briseis had whispered words of mercy in my ear, and I had no heart to add to the general ruin. But when the maddened crowd, incensed at the profligate's disdain of their distress, surged round his house like an angry sea, and tore him from his own door, and his leman with him, and trampled them out of all shape underneath a multitude of avenging feet, I also held my hand, saying to my Queen:

"Come; we have tarried here too long. Let us be going."

Soon we reached the open space outside the city bounds, and, pressing on through the flying throng, who sought refuge on the plain, gained the foot of the mighty tower, and, unlocking the brazen doors, entered, tired, hungry, and thirsty, but safe at last.

The huge vault between the great foundation walls was used as a public granary, and an ample supply of water poured always into a marble bath in the centre of the floor, conveyed in earthen pipes laid underground from the distant hills; so we felt no fear of immediate privation, and, setting twenty sentries round the walls, with orders to let none but ladies and soldiers of the guard enter, I and Valdo, with Penares, ascended the steep and winding stair to the dizzy summit of the column.

I was weary, and faint for want of food, but could not rest till from that commanding height I had gained a view of the extent of the night's destruction.

What I saw put the desire of food from me, so that when I went down again I ate but little, and that grudgingly, as one compelled against his will.

The afternoon was well advanced and the sun's slanting rays fell full upon a vast expanse of fallen masonry, relieved and broken here and there by skeleton walls—through which the light streamed strangely—standing gaunt and grim above the wreck, amongst which moved a restless throng of houseless wanderers.

In some places dull flame and blue smoke rose from the ruins, and over all was the greyness of the fallen dust, and the confused murmur of many voices. Nearer to the tower, where the shock had been less severe, sounds of riotous mirth and the clash of arms came up to where we stood and gazed, while once, borne on a turn of the breeze, there trembled in the air a fragment of the priests' song:

Count your days and count your years;
Mind the blood-tie that endears
Heart to heart and soul to soul—
Short is all life, and Death its goal!

Beyond the city the sea tossed sullenly, its foremost surges breaking on the shattered inshore edge of the submerged bay, and in a curving line well-nigh encompassing the stricken town within its briny arms.

But it was not to the south, nor to the east, nor west, where many leagues of land had sunk beneath the rolling tide, that we looked at longest and with most dismay. It was to the north, where a level plain with forest-clad hills rising in the distance should have met our gaze, that we saw the sight that blanched our cheeks and filled us with a nameless fear.

The hills were gone, and in their place and nearer still upon the plain we caught the silvery glint of sunlight playing on the surface of the sea!

Incredulous, we looked again, straining our weary eyes upon the distance, but our first glimpse was a true one, and following the gleaming line of water we could trace it without a single break to the ocean on east and west, nor saw we any land rising from it, even in the north. Valdo first found voice in the silent awe in which we stood, staring with moistened eyes; saying, with a touch of his old dogged recklessness:

"So the prophecy that was told concerning the death of the Sleeper is true, and the day of Atlantis' end is here! Let it be thus: we who are men and know how to meet adversity like soldiers will stay here, defying the doom to the last, and dying, when the time comes, as men who have seen death too often to be affrighted at his shape!"

Penares swore a round oath that come what might, he cared not, so that he could die at the last with a blade in his hand and a foe before him; but I answered—grown wiser with sorrow and years:

"Our end comes how and when it will, my warriors, and not as we would wish, and 'tis more manly to take greater thought for the lives of others than for our own entrance to the shadows. For the sake of the fair ones whom we have brought across the city, it will be well if we can fly from here while yet there is time. We must secure the *Ravager*, and have her put to rights, and with as many as she will hold, put forth to sea."

"You are right, King," said Valdo, stroking his beard thoughtfully, "but it maketh me no less bitter 'gainst womankind to know that they may yet be the death of us, for if we wait until the ship is ready for them, as well as we rough men, a new calamity may happen."

"With them, I will sail hence," I replied, "without them, I stay here, though I die in a common grave like the unrecognisable thousands buried under yonder ruins."

They said no more, but following me, descended the tedious stair. I knew Valdo of old, and knew his fulminations against the gentler sex to be a besetting habit more than a real callousness, else I had been deeply grieved.

Need I tell of the days of misery that fast succeeded one another? Of the nights made hideous with the glare and roar of incendiary fires, the wild carousing of the drunken mobs, the shrieks of agony from the hundreds of those of gentler birth, who fell a prey to the howling hordes of ruffians who ruled supreme in the city? Of the days spent in ceaseless watch and ward, and often in fighting, to keep the rebels from our gates, lest they should seize our stores of food and put us to death? I need not.

'Twill be enough to say that the horror-stricken thousands of the once stately city had lost all sense of loyalty or order and, led by the most daring spirits, had armed themselves as best they could, robbed and pillaged right and left, put to the sword all the nobles on whom they could lay hands, and then, intoxicated with success and the brief enjoyment of the luxuries taken from the great houses, had given way to the wildest excesses of riot and lawlessness.

The killing of the young and dissolute noble, which I had witnessed, was, so to speak, first blood to the restless, homeless bands, and thereafter 'twas in vain for the priests to go amongst them in endeavour to allay the mad tumult.

For two days we who watched from the upper stories saw the dignified procession wending its way through the stony avenues, and heard snatches of their warning song.

but on the third day neither saw nor heard a sign of them, and on the fourth, Kalen, the Priest of Love, crawled to our gates, wounded and alone—as many a noble and soldier and woman had done before—and, nearly at the last gasp, was taken in.

"I alone am left of the priests of the city," was all he said.

We had then three hundred well-armed men within our walls, as well as two hundred women and children, and felt no fear of holding the place against the violence of the undisciplined hordes in the city, who were fast relapsing into barbarism.

But on the fourth day the water in the basin ran brackish as the sea, and we knew that the pipes from the distant hills were broken by the land subsidence, and the ocean water had entered.

That we were now on a sea-girt isle, cut off from what was left of Atlantis—if, indeed, any was left—the rebels knew as well as we, for from the column top we had seen messengers come in from the plain with the dreadful news, the panic with which it was received, the sending out of other messengers northward to make sure, their return with sobered faces, and the frenzy of despair with which their report was greeted.

But the ignorant masses had no thought of anything save swift pleasure and mad riot, and the smoking city, its ruins thronged now with thousands of the country people driven south by the advancing sea, was plunged into a still deeper and more savage saturnalia.

So we dared not venture out to the three wells nearest us lest our number should be reduced, and in the end, after enduring a foretaste of the tortures of thirst till some of our weakest died, we dug a well, wide and deep, down into the earth beneath the basin, having first removed the latter and stopped up the earthen pipes, and thus secured a good supply of the precious fluid.

To make our store of food last as long as possible, I had our little party numbered and the amount of grain and other edibles measured to the smallest portion, to each man and woman giving an equal share daily, and a lesser equal share to each child, myself and my own family being no exception to the rule, and found that with strict stinting of our stomachs we could hold our post for the space of five months.

"By which time," I said to Atris, "it may be that the rebel fever will have worn itself out, and the people will have come to reason."

"Ah, ye Spirits! Well was it for me, then, that Kalen, the Priest of Love, was no finder-out of the secrets of the future! Well, altogether well!

Before the second month had passed, the stores of food in the sea-girt land were nearly all consumed, for much provision had gone down in the ill-fated fleet, along with some thousands of sailors, and hunger stared the famished hordes of ragged beings in the face.

They rioted still more, fought with each other for scraps of offal 'mid the ruins, gnawed the bark of trees out on the lessening plain, ate the putrid flesh of dogs and horses, and at the last, famine and pestilence swept through their ranks, slaying them by hundreds at a time, till only a miserable company of emaciated forms crept round the tower; weak, but fierce and cunning, and still too many for us to venture out.

For some reasons we could have been happy while we lived in that tower of refuge, for we suffered and hoped and thought in common, there being no envy nor malice amongst us, no lords and no servitors, each doing his best for the good of all, each threatened by the same danger and eating the same food.

I bade them cease all ceremony in addressing me, though that they found hard, and, had we been ignorant of the chaos outside, we should have lived as a happy family.

But when we daily, hourly, heard the sound of revel or of riot, or the wail of anguish or lamentation at the ravage of the pestilence, or marked that line of water in the north ever creeping nearer, and the shore-line of the harbour sinking more and more, our hearts were sad and sore.

And when the breath of the fell disease swept over the land, and the odour from the unburied dead was wafted to us on the air continuously, till many of us sickened and died, the smile fled from our faces and the jest remained unuttered on our lips.

And when my darling Vesta fell beneath the foul blight and was summoned by Amarunth to the Shadows, and we bore her outside the walls one night and buried her with the Passport Piece between her little fingers, Briseis and I found the cup of our sorrow full to overflowing.

Let me pass on.

(To be continued.)

POST-CARD COMPETITION.—2.

New Series.

A prize of two guineas is offered for the best anagram on the words, "*Short Stories* is best." Post-cards only, please. Date of closing, Monday, January 11th.

Result of Jumbled Story Competition, No. 24.

See page 45.

The first prize of £5 goes to Mr. Claude B. Lemon, 22, Stanley Crescent, Kensington Park, W.

Prizes of £1 each have been sent to Mr. W. H. Fitz-Gerald, 9, Ondine Road, East Dulwich, S.E.; Miss N. Marshal, Reed Vale, Teignmouth, S. Devon; Miss M. E. Spencer, 8, Bettridge Road, Fulham, S.W.; and Mr. J. Burton, 102, Glenparke Road, Forest Gate, E.; and Mr. E. Beardsley, 31, Ponsonby Place, Westminster, S.W.

None of our Irish readers have succeeded in correctly solving this Jumbled Story.

Jumbled Story Competition.—27.

On page 64 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday*,
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY*.
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *January 11th*, and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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CURIOUS EFFECTS IN THE TREATMENT OF CORPULENCY.

THE old-fashioned methods of curing obesity were based upon the adoption of a sort of starvation dietary. Would any reader now believe that by the new orthodox treatment a stout patient can take almost double his usual quantity of food, and yet decrease one or two pounds of fat daily for a time? This is very singular, and directly hostile to previous opinions held by medical authorities, yet it is a fact. The author of the comparatively new system in question explains that the person under treatment is restored to a healthier state in the small space of twenty-four hours, having lost probably 2lb. of superfluous deposit, the organs display great activity, and more food is required. By standing on a weighing machine the proof of reduction is incontrovertibly shown daily. In serious cases a pound to ten pound weekly loss is registered until the person approaches his or her normal weight, then the diminution becomes less pronounced, the muscles firmer, the brain more active, less sleep is desired, and finally a cure is effected. Compiled reprints of medical and other journals, and interesting particulars, including the book, entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure" (256 pages), containing the "recipe," which is quite harmless, can be obtained post free from Mr. Russell, of Woburn House, 27, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., by inclosing two penny stamps.—*Dublin Weekly Freeman.*

A POSITIVE REMEDY FOR CORPULENCE.

Any remedy that can be suggested as a cure or alleviation for stoutness will be heartily welcomed. We have recently received a well-written book, the author of which seems to know what he is talking about. It is entitled, "Corpulency, and the Cure" (256 pages), and is a cheap issue (only twopence), published by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. Our space will not do justice to this book; send for it yourself. It appears that Mr. Russell has submitted all kinds of proofs to the English Press. The editor of the *Tablet*, the Catholic organ, writes: "Mr. Russell does not give us the slighest loophole for a doubt as to the value of his cure, for in the most straightforward and matter-of-fact manner he submitted some hundreds of original and unsolicited testimonial letters for our perusal, and offered us plenty more if required. To assist him to make this remedy known, we think we cannot do better than publish quotations from some of the letters submitted. The first one, a marchioness, writes from Madrid—'My son, Count ——, has reduced his weight in twenty-two days 16 kilos = *i.e.*, 34lb.' Another writes—'So far (six weeks from the commencement of following your system) I have lost fully two stone in weight.' The next (a lady) writes—'I am just half the size.' A fourth—'I find it is successful in my case. I have lost 8lb. in weight since I commenced (two weeks).' Another writes—'A reduction of 18lb. in a month is a great success.' A lady from Bournemouth writes—'I feel much better, have less difficulty in breathing, and can walk about.' Again, a lady says—'It reduced me considerably, not only in the body, but all over.'" The author is very positive. He says—"Step on a weighing machine on Monday morning and again on Tuesday, and I guarantee that you have lost 2lb. in weight without the slighest harm, and vast improvement in health through ridding the system of unhealthy accumulations." — *Cork Herald.*

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On receipt of stamped envelope, a lady who cured herself of Deafness and Noises in the Head, after fifteen years of suffering, will send to all afflicted free particulars of the Remedy, which is simple, safe, sure and inexpensive. Address — Mrs. C. E. AUSTIN, 7, Addington Crescent, York Road, London, S.E.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 27.] [*See Page 62.*

THE LIE W. CAUTIL TOLD

Once upon a time a little white cloud left its girl, while she listened tearfully. She clung to him, and the sun, for he thought that it might spoil her blue sky.

The man walked to the railway station and from the station, and soon left the country village and placid lakes.

The man was talking long and earnestly to the girl. Then he walked on towards the station.

Then the man kissed her again, and, taking his way she turned a corner, and the cloud was not sobbing. Was it possible that he shook her off just there was a half-sneer on his lips.

When he had finished his story the woman tapped soundly.

And this interested the little cloud more than one before."

"I will follow him," he said; "and see what he saw deep valleys. He crossed rushing rivers fascinating, so wondrously beautiful.

That night, as the little cloud looked on the basket.

He crossed the mighty ocean.

At this the little cloud sighed heavily.

Which, when one comes to think of it, was not so far behind.

When at last the journey came to an end, and the wench was feeding the geese with grain from a distant view with great, unseeing eyes.

"Bah! how cold and miserable," he said.

Somehow he felt that already he hated that man. The man was telling the woman of his country feet.

He passed over mountain tops. Far below him away over the city.

"Oh," he cried, "this is quite ideal. Dear me, I left them sitting there together, and sailed swiftly in his little life had the cloud seen a creature so rolled down her sleeves.

"Why can't she understand?" the man muttered. In the farm the cows waited to be milked. The geese, and cows, and more, a charming country clapped them joyously, and sailed away across the great houses, he noticed a man and woman sitting very surprising.

The girl ran forward when she saw him, and walked down the road. The little cloud followed him lightly on his arm.

Then the farm gate clicked behind her, and she disappeared long ago. I declare I have never seen geese cackled for their food.

The little cloud heard him, and noticed now that a letter that the postman had given her. Her face remained very quiet and still as the train drew out a trifle impatiently? The little cloud was not sure.

"These country girls always take one so seriously."

He listened carefully to what they were saying.

A girl was standing at the gate of a farm reading adventures that morning.

Tired of all this grandeur, the little cloud found me in this wonderful world?"

He looked at the woman at his side. Never before anything he had ever seen before.

When the country girl had finished feeding the mischief he's up to."

"What shall I find," he cried, "that will interest our woman's hearts."

The girl remained very still, staring out to the arms of the country girl.

And the little cloud dissolved away into tears, with a gun under his arm awaiting her.

By the time the morning sun had risen in the geese, she put a large hat on her tumbled hair, and that it came from the man who had deserted her.

"Ah, you men," she said, "how you play with fresh complexion. When she had walked a little remained behind in the country.

The man replied tenderly, kissing the woman's corner, and waved his hand to the poor country English village. There were farmhouses, and clever thing. When he thought that no one would really thought that milkmaids with white arms had gun under his arm, strode away. He turned at the little cloud came out from the steam and looked very surprised to see a man in a shooting-jacket, threw her arms round his neck, while he kissed her cautiously, taking care to place himself between her parent's side, and unfurling its tiny, fleecy wings, to the ground. Instinctively the little cloud knew to the station, and hid himself in a volume of thick play with, others to win. The little cloud, disgusted, was very pale. The letter fluttered from her hand hand as he spoke, that some hearts were made to notice him he flapped his little wings and came down entered a train. Then the little cloud did a very smoke that the engine was giving out. Then he round him, he wished very much that he had out on a balcony, gazing up towards him. He looked again, and then—why then he saw that the man was the man he had seen that morning in the which fell, very softly, as drops of rain, at the girls' it a positive relief when he discovered beneath him nothing more interesting than a tiny, old-fashioned sky, he found himself over the little country village.

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WINDSOR CASTLE

Windsor, May 9/95.

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